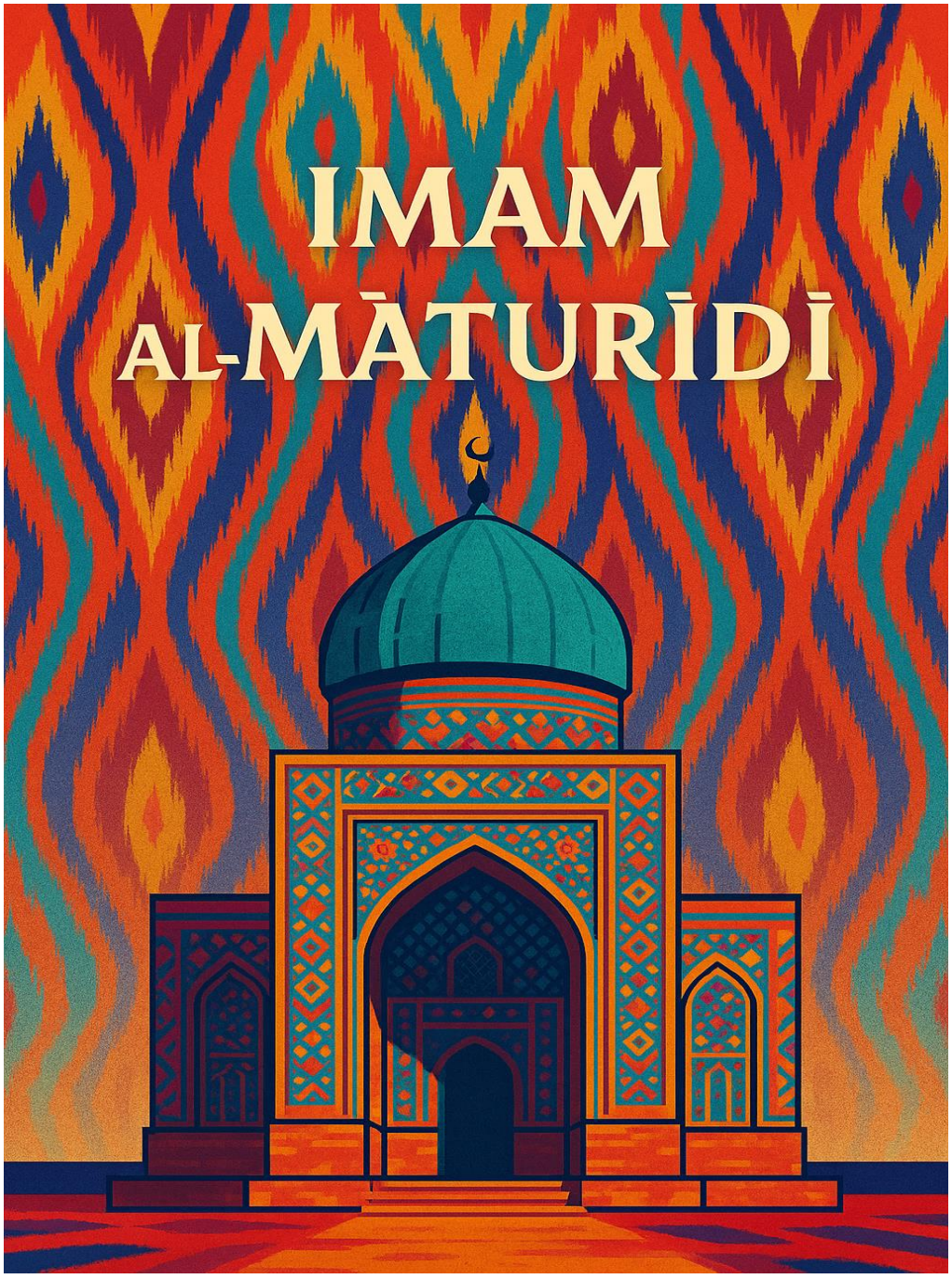
Imam Maturidi

Architect of Islamic Creed



Dr. Yusof Mutahar

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَىٰ مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَّجِيدٌ

اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ عَلَىٰ مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا بَارَكْتَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَّجِيدٌ

O Allah, bestow Your favour upon Muhammad ﷺ and upon the family of Muhammad, as You bestowed Your favour upon Ibrahim and upon the family of Ibrahim. Indeed, You are Praiseworthy, Glorious.

O Allah, bestow Your blessing upon Muhammad ﷺ and upon the family of Muhammad, as You bestowed Your blessing upon Ibrahim and upon the family of Ibrahim. Indeed, You are Praiseworthy, Glorious.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In every century, Allāh has raised scholars who restored balance when confusion spread, and clarity when deviation appeared. Among those great protectors of Sunni Islam stands Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, a theologian whose legacy safeguarded the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamāʿah for more than a thousand years. He stood at a crossroads in Islamic history, confronting intellectual excess on one side and simplistic literalism on the other. With precision, insight, and unwavering loyalty to revelation, he preserved the middle path of this Ummah.

Despite his stature as one of the two great Imāms of Sunni creed, his name remains far less known in the English-speaking world. The reason is not a lack of influence or brilliance, but a lack of access. His works have remained largely locked in Arabic, Persian, or Turkish scholarship, hidden from the modern Muslim mind that so desperately needs them.

This book seeks to revive his voice. It introduces his life, explores his theology, defends his method, and demonstrates his relevance in our age. At a time when Muslims are torn between rigid literalism and unanchored rationalism, the Māturīdī tradition returns as a light of balance: affirming the text while honouring the intellect, defending tawḥīd while rejecting anthropomorphism, and preserving revelation from distortion and misuse.

INTRODUCTION

Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī of Samarqand (d. 333 AH / 944 CE) stands as one of the foundational architects of Sunni theology. Alongside Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, he articulated the orthodox creed of Ahl al-Sunnah in a time when the Muslim world was flooded with competing theological claims, foreign philosophies, and extremist interpretations. His mission was not merely to refute falsehood, but to build a framework in which the Qur'ān could be understood with clarity, depth, and intellectual integrity.

He lived in the rich scholarly environment of Transoxiana, where the Hanafi tradition flourished. He inherited the intellectual legacy of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, who emphasised both the obligation of reason and the authority of revelation. From this soil, Imām al-Māturīdī developed a theology that protected tawḥīd from distortion on both extremes: those who exaggerated reason until it overshadowed revelation, and those who clung to the surface of texts until they stripped Allāh of transcendence.

The same two extremes reappear in our world today in different clothing. On one side, secular philosophies and scientism deny God, deny the soul, and deny meaning. On the other, rigid literalism spreads confusion, reduces the Divine to physical imagery, and drives people away from a faith that should enlighten the heart and mind. In between these two pressures, many Muslims find themselves struggling.

It is here that Imām al-Māturīdī becomes not merely relevant, but necessary. His theology is not a relic for museums or academic shelves; it is a living method that restores balance, protects the intellect, and strengthens īmān. His thought shows that Islam is not afraid of questions, nor threatened by inquiry, nor weakened by reflection.

Instead, true Sunnī creed invites reflection, nourishes the intellect, and leads the believer to certainty.

This book will guide the reader through his life, his works, his creed, his method, his impact, and his urgent relevance for today. It aims to revive a neglected legacy and place it back in the hands of the Ummah—where it always belonged.

Chapter 1 — Early Life and the World of Transoxiana

Imām Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Māturīdī was born in the mid-third/ninth century (commonly given as 853 CE) in the village of Māturīd near Samarqand, in the region the classical sources call Mā Warāʾ an-Nahr—Transoxiana to later geographers. The nisbah "al-Māturīdī" ties him permanently to this landscape: a meeting point of languages and empires, where caravans threaded the Silk Road and where books travelled as surely as spices and silk. The geography matters. Between Bukhārā and Samarqand, scholarly lineages overlapped with trade routes; arguments crossed borders; and the young student who listened carefully could hear the entire world of late antique and early Islamic debate echoing through the madrasas and mosques.

Samarqand in his youth was already a citadel of Ḥanafī jurisprudence and a vigorous center of Qurʾānic sciences, ḥadīth, grammar, and kalām. Greek philosophical texts had filtered eastward; Muʿtazilī rationalism had admirers in some courts and study-circles; over-literal readings of scripture held sway in others; and the religious memory of older Iranian traditions still lingered among segments of the populace. This plurality did not produce confusion for al-Māturīdī; it produced clarity. He learned to distinguish sound premises from sophistry, transmitted authority from conjecture, and the measured discipline of method from the temptations of polemic.

His education unfolded under the shade of the Ḥanafī school. Through teachers tied to the intellectual chain of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah—among them figures such as Abū Naṣr al-ʿIyāḍī and Abū Bakr al-Jūzjānī—he absorbed a way of thinking that honored both **naql** (revelation and its

reliable transmission) and ʿ**aql** (the intellect as a God-given instrument for recognizing truth). From this soil, al-Māturīdī learned that reason is not a rival to revelation, but its servant and interpreter—an inner witness that recognizes signs God has placed in the horizons and within the self. His curriculum was comprehensive: fiqh and uṣūl, Qurʾān and tafsīr, ḥadīth and its principles, Arabic language, logic, and the debates of kalām. Each discipline tempered the others, preventing jurisprudence from becoming arid technicality, theology from collapsing into speculation, and spirituality from drifting without law.

What set al-Māturīdī apart even in that rich environment was temperament. Where some reacted, he reflected. Where others argued to win, he reasoned to clarify. Theological construction, in his hands, resembled architecture: foundations first, weight distributed properly, adornment never allowed to bear the load. In a period when ideas travelled fast and sectarian identities hardened quickly, his calm method offered something the region desperately needed—**stability without stagnation**. He neither surrendered the Qurʾān to philosophy nor banished the intellect from the house of revelation. He refused to read figurative language as anatomy and refused to empty the Divine Names of meaning in the name of transcendence. He sought instead a path where text and reason walk together toward certainty.

Transoxiana prepared him for this work. The same roads that brought disputation also brought manuscripts; the same diversity that threatened confusion supplied the comparative vantage he needed to articulate orthodoxy with precision. By the time al-Māturīdī began to teach and write in earnest, he had witnessed the full spectrum of error that pulls the believer off balance: the exaggeration of reason until revelation is dimmed, and the exaggeration of literal surface until transcendence is endangered. His answer would not be a narrow reaction to either extreme, but a comprehensive theology grounded in Qurʾān and

Sunnah, disciplined by the methods of the jurists, and confident in the intelligibility of faith.

Little survives about his private life, and the silence is telling. He did not cultivate a public persona; he cultivated students. He did not write about himself; he wrote so that **tawḥīd** might be understood without distortion. The humility of his biography stands in inverse proportion to the reach of his ideas. From a quiet corner of Samarqand, he would shape the creed of vast Ḥanafī lands—from Transoxiana and Khurāsān to the Ottoman world and the Indian Subcontinent—becoming, in truth and without excess, an **architect of Islamic creed**: conservative in sources, courageous in thought, and unwavering in his insistence that the religion of Muḥammad ﷺ is at once **revealed, reasonable, and radiant with transcendence**.

Chapter 2 — Teachers, Chains of Knowledge, and Intellectual Formation

Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī did not emerge in isolation. He was shaped by a living continuum of Sunni scholarship transmitted through isnād, character, and disciplined study. His formation reflects a classical Islamic principle: *true knowledge is inherited, not merely discovered*. To understand his theology, one must first understand the scholarly world that produced him.

1. His Teachers and the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī Lineage

Among his principal teachers were:

- **Imām Abū Naṣr Aḥmad ibn al-ʿAbbās al-ʿIyāḍī (d. 295 AH)**
- **Imām Abū Bakr al-Jūzjānī**
- **Imām Abū Sahl al-Samarqandī**

Through them, he inherited the intellectual and theological legacy of the Ḥanafī school, tracing ultimately back to:

- **Imām Muḥammad al-Shaybānī**
- **Imām Abū Yūsuf**
- **Imām Abū Ḥanīfah**

This chain did more than transmit information—it transmitted *method*, *adab*, and *principle*. From Abū Ḥanīfah's school he absorbed the conviction that revelation is supreme, and reason is a God-given instrument for understanding it. From his direct teachers he learned precision in argument, discipline in interpretation, and humility in speech.

Thus, al-Māturīdī did not invent a new creed. He **systematized, articulated, and defended** the theological worldview of the early Ḥanafī tradition, building a fortress around its core principles when they were threatened by confusion and philosophical excess.

2. His Curriculum: A Complete Scholar, Not a Single-Discipline Mind

Al-Māturīdī mastered the full spectrum of classical Islamic sciences. Among the fields that shaped his intellect were:

- **Fiqh and Uṣūl al-Fiqh** – training him in disciplined legal reasoning and hermeneutics.
- **Tafsīr** – teaching him to interpret revelation with linguistic precision and theological coherence.
- **Ḥadīth and Riwayah** – grounding him in isnād culture and respect for authentic transmission.
- **ʿIlm al-Kalām** – equipping him to defend orthodox doctrine against deviant theology and foreign ideas.
- **Manṭiq (Logic)** – giving him clarity of definition, structure of argument, and mastery of rational method.
- **Lughah and Balāghah (Arabic Language and Eloquence)** – enabling him to extract layered Qur'ānic meanings with linguistic sensitivity.

This breadth meant that al-Māturīdī could read the Qur'ān as a jurist, explain it as a mufassir, defend it as a mutakallim, and internalize it as a man of spirituality. His theology was never the product of one discipline overpowering the rest—it was a harmony of transmitted knowledge (*naql*) and rational reflection (*ʿaql*), each in its rightful place.

3. Reason in Service of Revelation

From his Ḥanafī heritage, he adopted a principle that would define his theological legacy:

Reason is the instrument for understanding revelation, not a rival to it.

He believed:

- Reason can recognize the existence of God,
- Reason can detect moral truths,
- Reason allows humans to be responsible (*mukallaf*),
- But reason must bow before revelation when it reaches its limit.

In his thought, the intellect is a lamp, not a sun—it illuminates but does not originate truth.

4. His Spiritual Formation and Adab

Although famed as a theologian, al-Māturīdī's students remembered him for his humility, devotion, and spiritual discipline. He avoided public spectacle, refused to chase notoriety, and lived a life of quiet scholarship in Samarqand. His writings and conduct reflect:

- Reverence for the Qur'ān
- Caution in speech
- Sincerity in intention
- Worship anchored in certainty

His creed was not merely intellectual—it was *ʿibādah*, an act of worship defending the purity of tawḥīd.

5. Formation in an Age of Intellectual Turbulence

Al-Māturīdī matured during a period of theological upheaval. The Muslim world faced:

- **Muʿtazilī over-rationalization**
- **Literalist anti-intellectualism**
- **Esoteric Bāṭinī propaganda**
- **Hellenistic philosophical influence**
- **Fragmented sectarian claims**

Where many reacted emotionally, al-Māturīdī responded systematically. He internalized every argument, understood its roots, and then refuted it with calm discipline. This environment did not confuse him—it prepared him. He became the stabilizing intellect the Ummah needed.

Conclusion of Chapter 2

By the end of his formative period, Imām al-Māturīdī possessed:

- A sound scholarly lineage,
- A balanced mastery of the Islamic sciences,
- A disciplined rational method rooted in revelation,
- And a spiritual character marked by humility and certainty.

This foundation would allow him to become not merely a scholar of his era, but a *mujaddid* of creed whose thought would shape Sunni theology for centuries.

Chapter 3 — His Spiritual Personality and Inner World

Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī is often remembered for his intellect—but his intellectual clarity flowed from spiritual purity, not from cold philosophy. His writings and legacy reveal a scholar whose theology was born from devotion, reverence, and deep sincerity. He embodied the Qur'ānic ideal of a heart illuminated by faith and a mind disciplined by reflection. To understand his creed, one must first understand the *soul* behind it.

1. Knowledge as Worship, Not Argument

For al-Māturīdī, theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) was not a sport of debate, nor a tool of ego. Knowledge was an act of *ʿibādah*. He believed that the highest purpose of intellect was to recognize Allāh, submit to Him, and defend His oneness from distortion. Thus, every theological discussion in his work carries a tone of dignity, restraint, and responsibility.

He never refuted opponents to humiliate them, nor did he write to display brilliance. His aim was *protection*, not performance—*iṣlāḥ* (rectification), not rivalry. This spiritual intention gave his writings a calmness and clarity unmatched by harsher polemicists of his era.

2. Humility and Detachment from Fame

Unlike many scholars whose biographies are filled with travels, court positions, and public appearances, al-Māturīdī lived quietly in Samarqand. He avoided:

- seeking political patronage,
- debating for fame,

- and attaching himself to rulers.

The scarcity of dramatic personal anecdotes in the historical record is itself a testimony. He wished to be known by his ideas, not by his personality or public profile. His legacy is therefore not built on charisma or power, but on *principle*.

This humility reflects the Qur'ānic ethic:

"The servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth with humility…"
(Qur'ān 25:63)

3. Certainty (Yaqīn) and Tranquility (Sakīnah)

Al-Māturīdī's writings exude a quiet confidence. He does not sound anxious, reactionary, or defensive. His arguments reflect the serenity of a man whose heart is settled with yaqīn. He viewed the signs of Allāh in creation, revelation, and reason as harmonious. This harmony produced tranquility in his soul and certainty in his thought.

His theology was not merely logical—it was *existential*: a way of seeing the world that fills the soul with peace and coherence.

4. Adab with Revelation and the Unseen

A defining feature of his spirituality is *adab*—refined etiquette—with the Qur'ān and the matters of the unseen. He refused to speak about Allāh without knowledge, and he refused to pry into metaphysical details that the revelation intentionally left ambiguous. This restraint is the marks of spiritual maturity.

He adhered to the Prophetic instruction:

"Reflect on the creation of Allāh, and do not reflect on the Essence of Allāh."
(Narrated by al-Bayhaqī)

This balance protected him from two spiritual diseases:

- **speculative arrogance** (overthinking the unseen), and
- **rigid literalism** (flattening transcendence into crude imagery)

His tafwīḍ—*leaving the "how" of divine attributes to Allāh*—was not an evasion; it was adab.

5. Worship, Character, and Inner Focus

Though little survives about his daily routine, the testimony of his students and the tone of his work indicate:

- consistency in worship,
- sincerity in intention,
- gentleness in character,
- and refinement in moral conduct.

The *fruit* of his soul is seen in the *balance* of his creed. An imbalanced soul cannot produce a balanced theology.

6. A Scholar of Depth, Not Noise

In an age where theology was often noisy, al-Māturīdī was a voice of depth. His spiritual world was inward, reflective, and God-centered. His silence about himself is louder than entire biographies of others. It tells us:

- He feared riyaa' (showing off),
- He guarded his sincerity,
- And he viewed himself as a servant, not a celebrity.

Because he purified his intention, Allāh placed acceptance in his legacy. Centuries have passed, empires have fallen, yet his thought lives on—from Samarqand to Istanbul, from Delhi to Bukhārā, from the madrasahs of Transoxiana to the universities of the modern world.

Conclusion of Chapter 3

Imām al-Māturīdī's theology cannot be separated from his spirituality. His balanced creed grew from a balanced heart. His restraint in words came from humility. His defense of tawḥīd came from reverence. His confidence came from certainty. His tolerance came from spiritual maturity. He stands as a reminder that true theology is not born in the ego—it is born in the heart of a servant who knows His Lord.

Chapter 4 — Historical Challenges and the Need for a Renewed Creed

The age in which Imām al-Māturīdī lived was one of profound intellectual upheaval. The unity of belief that characterized the era of the Companions and early Successors was being tested by foreign philosophies, internal sects, and political turbulence. As the Muslim world expanded beyond Arabia into Persia, Central Asia, and lands shaped by Greek, Persian, and Indian intellectual traditions, the Ummah encountered new questions, new ideologies, and new theological pressures that demanded a principled response.

Imām al-Māturīdī did not enter a silent or stable world—he entered a storm. His mission was not merely to *refute*, but to *restore harmony and clarity* to Sunni belief.

1. The Flood of Foreign Philosophies

As translations of Greek philosophy spread through the Muslim world, particularly through the Bayt al-Ḥikmah in Baghdad, concepts from Plato, Aristotle, and Neo-Platonism began influencing Islamic discourse. Some Muslim thinkers, dazzled by these systems, attempted to interpret revelation through Hellenistic categories. Others went further, subordinating revelation entirely to rational speculation.

This produced two dangers:

- **Excessive Rationalism (Muʿtazilah)** – which exalted reason to the point of judging or denying transmitted truths.

- **Philosophical Syncretism** – which attempted to merge foreign metaphysics with Islamic creed.

Al-Māturīdī recognized the threat: unchecked rationalism would strip Islam of its revealed foundations and turn theology into abstraction. He responded by affirming a balanced principle:

Reason *serves* revelation; it does not *rule* over it.

2. The Rise of Literalist Extremes

On the opposite end, certain scholars, in their zeal to defend scripture, clung to the most superficial literal meanings of verses and ḥadīth. They rejected rational engagement altogether, claiming that *any* interpretation was deviation. This produced a crude, body-based theology in which divine attributes were imagined in human-like terms, implying direction, movement, and physicality.

This threatened the essence of tawḥīd. Anthropomorphism (*tajsīm*) violated the Qur'ānic principle:

"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him."
(Qur'ān 42:11)

Where the rationalist endangered faith by denying attributes, the literalist endangered faith by *misunderstanding* them. Both extremes, though opposite in method, led to the same outcome: distortion of Allāh's majesty.

Al-Māturīdī stepped forward to defend **tanzīh**—the utter transcendence of God—while still affirming the revealed attributes without negation.

3. Sectarian Fragmentation and Theological Instability

The Muslim world of the 3rd and 4th Islamic centuries witnessed an explosion of sectarian movements:

- **Muʿtazilah** denying attributes in the name of transcendence
- **Hashawiyyah and Mujassimah** affirming attributes in the language of bodies and organs
- **Jahmiyyah** reducing theology to negation and abstraction
- **Bāṭiniyyah / Ismāʿīliyyah** promoting esoteric doctrine detached from the Qur'ān
- **Khārijite remnants** reviving harsh, literalist legal-theology
- **Qadariyyah and Jabbariyyah** pushing extremes in free-will and predestination

The Ummah was in danger of losing theological equilibrium.

Imām al-Māturīdī's role was not merely academic—it was *civilizational*. He rose to:

- Refute each deviant claim with precision,
- Re-anchor creed in revelation,
- And restore clarity to a confused public.

4. Political Pressures and the Crisis of Creed

Theological debates were not merely scholarly—they were entangled with politics. Courts, caliphs, and sultans sometimes weaponized theology to legitimize power. The Miḥnah (inquisition) under the Muʿtazilī-influenced Abbasids, though earlier than al-Māturīdī, still cast a long shadow over theological discussions in his era. The Ummah remembered the trauma of dogma enforced by the state.

This environment raised urgent questions:

- *Who has the authority to define creed?*
- *Which principles are non-negotiable?*
- *What is the Sunni response to power, innovation, and deviation?*

Al-Māturīdī's answer was consistent:

Creed must be grounded in the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and sound reason — not in the passions of rulers, the excesses of philosophers, or the imaginations of literalists.

5. Why the Ummah Needed a Renewed Creed

By the time al-Māturīdī reached intellectual maturity, the need was clear. The Ummah required a theology that could:

- Resist foreign philosophical domination
- Reject anthropomorphism without denying attributes
- Affirm reason without elevating it above revelation
- Defend free will without denying divine decree
- Unite Sunnis on a coherent framework of belief

This is precisely what he achieved.

He did not merely defend Sunni creed—he *organized it*, *clarified it*, and *armed it* against deviations. His work restored creed to its original Qur'ānic balance: transcendence with affirmation, reason with revelation, clarity with humility.

Conclusion of Chapter 4

Imām al-Māturīdī rose in an era when Islamic theology was at risk of fragmentation, distortion, and imbalance. Through his discipline,

scholarship, and spiritual clarity, he preserved orthodoxy and protected the Ummah from extremes. He became a theological architect precisely because he rebuilt structure where chaos had begun to spread.

Chapter 5 — His Major Works and Literary Contributions

The intellectual legacy of Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī rests upon a body of writing that shaped the course of Sunni theology for centuries. Although he lived a life of humility and relative privacy, his pen became his voice — a voice that echoed long after his death through students, scholars, and entire civilizations. His works were not written for fame, but to *protect creed, clarify revelation, and guide minds back to balance*. Three texts in particular define his contribution: **Kitāb al-Tawḥīd**, **Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah**, and **al-Maqālāt**.

1. Kitāb al-Tawḥīd — The Foundational Theological Treatise

Kitāb al-Tawḥīd is his most important theological work and one of the earliest systematic Sunni texts in ʿilm al-kalām. It addresses:

- The nature of belief,
- The proofs for God's existence,
- Divine attributes,
- Prophethood,
- Qadar and human responsibility,
- And core questions of Islamic epistemology.

In this text, al-Māturīdī does not react emotionally to rival views — he dissects them methodically. He presents opposing arguments in full, with accuracy and fairness, before dismantling them with precise reasoning and revealed proof. His tone is calm, rational, and confident. He demonstrates that Sunni creed is not a random inheritance, but a

coherent intellectual system rooted in the Qur'ān and fully capable of answering philosophical challenges.

Kitāb al-Tawḥīd became a model for later Sunnī theologians, especially in the Ḥanafī world. It shows that orthodoxy is not afraid of argument — it is strengthened by it.

2. Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah — His Monumental Qur'ānic Exegesis

His second major work, **Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah**, is a theological tafsīr of the Qur'ān that reflects his unique interpretive method. Unlike purely linguistic tafsīr works, al-Māturīdī's exegesis:

- Harmonizes language, theology, and rational reflection,
- Defends the creed of tawḥīd from corruption,
- Handles ambiguous verses with reverence and method,
- And protects revelation from literal distortion or deviant interpretation.

This tafsīr is sometimes referred to as *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, and it stands as one of the earliest comprehensive theological commentaries in Sunni history. It shows how the Qur'ān itself is the foundation of the Māturīdī creed — not Greek philosophy, not abstract speculation, and not blind literalism.

Here, al-Māturīdī demonstrates what would become the hallmark of his school: **affirming the attributes of Allāh while safeguarding transcendence, and using reason as a servant of revelation**. His interpretations became a blueprint for generations of theologians and jurists, especially in Ḥanafī lands.

3. Al-Maqālāt — Surveying and Refuting Deviant Sects

A third major contribution is his work known as **al-Maqālāt**, which catalogs, analyzes, and refutes the doctrines of various sects and theological movements of his time. He approaches each group with:

- Thorough documentation,
- Accurate summarization,
- And principled refutation.

This work demonstrates:

- His encyclopedic awareness of opposing systems,
- His commitment to intellectual honesty,
- And his ability to engage without caricature or slander.

Through *al-Maqālāt*, he mapped the theological landscape of his era, preserving for later scholars a record of beliefs and arguments that would otherwise have been lost.

4. A Lasting Literary Legacy

Al-Māturīdī's writings accomplished three civilizational objectives:

1. **They preserved orthodoxy** at a moment of vulnerability.
2. **They gave Sunnī creed structure** — transforming scattered principles into a systematic theology.
3. **They offered future generations a method**, not merely conclusions.

His writings did not produce followers — they produced *schools*. They did not silence debate — they *guided* it. They gave the Ummah a theology capable of defending itself in every age.

Conclusion of Chapter 5

Through these works, Imām al-Māturīdī became a central pillar of Sunni intellectual history. His pen fortified creed, disciplined reason, and interpreted revelation in a manner that preserved transcendence without denying meaning. His legacy is not merely in what he argued, but in *how* he argued — with precision, honesty, reverence, and unwavering commitment to truth.

Chapter 6 — The Spread of the Māturīdī School

The influence of Imām al-Māturīdī did not end in Samarqand. From his modest study circle in Central Asia, a theological tradition emerged that would shape the creed of vast Muslim civilizations for over a millennium. His students carried his teachings throughout Transoxiana, and from there, through trade routes, political networks, scholarly travel, and institutional learning, the Māturīdī school spread across the Islamic world. Regions flourished under it, empires adopted it, and generations of jurists, theologians, and sages anchored their faith in its principles.

The spread of Māturīdī thought is a testimony to its balance, depth, and compatibility with revelation and reason alike.

1. Central Asia: The Birthplace and Early Stronghold

Samarqand, Bukhārā, and the lands of Transoxiana became the first strongholds of Māturīdī theology. These regions were already bastions of the Ḥanafī madhhab, and the compatibility between Ḥanafī legal theory and Māturīdī theology made the two inseparable partners. His earliest students — including Imām Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, Imām Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī, and Imām Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī — became pillars in formalizing and spreading his creed.

Through them, the school gained structure, producing commentaries, summaries, and teaching texts that preserved al-Māturīdī's methodology. His theology became the intellectual backbone of the Ḥanafī world.

2. The Seljuks and the Expansion into Khurāsān, Persia, and Anatolia

With the rise of the Seljuk Empire, the influence of the Ḥanafī–Māturīdī tradition expanded dramatically. The Seljuks, ruling vast territories from Persia to Anatolia, patronized Ḥanafī fiqh and Māturīdī kalām. Under their governance:

- Madrasahs were built,
- Curricula were standardized,
- And Sunni orthodoxy was defended against sectarian fragmentation.

This period marked the first major political expansion of Māturīdī thought. It was no longer the theology of a region — it became the theology of a civilization.

3. The Ottoman Empire: Māturīdism as the Official Sunni Creed

The greatest institutional spread of the Māturīdī school occurred under the **Ottoman Empire**, where Māturīdī theology, alongside Ḥanafī jurisprudence, became the official doctrinal position of the state. For over 600 years, from the Balkans to Anatolia, from Syria to Egypt, and deep into Eastern Europe, mosques, courts, and academies taught Māturīdī creed as the theological expression of Ahl al-Sunnah.

The Ottoman ʿulamā’ — men such as İbn Kemāl, al-Taftāzānī (whose commentaries they cherished), and many others — ensured that Māturīdī theological education flourished in every major intellectual center of the empire, including Istanbul, Bursa, and Edirne. This gave the school unprecedented cultural and institutional reach.

4. The Indian Subcontinent: A Māturīdī Heartland

The Indian Subcontinent became another pillar of Māturīdī heritage. Through the influence of Central Asian scholars and the later Mughal Empire, Ḥanafī–Māturīdī thought became deeply rooted in these lands. Institutions such as:

- *Farangī Maḥall*,
- *Deoband*,
- and the great seminaries of Delhi and Lucknow,

produced scholars who preserved, systematized, and taught Māturīdī creed to millions. From there, the tradition spread to Afghanistan, Kashmir, Bengal, and beyond.

To this day, the overwhelming majority of Ḥanafīs in South Asia — representing a massive portion of the global Sunni population — follow the Māturīdī theological tradition, whether explicitly or through inherited curricula.

5. North Africa, the Balkans, and Beyond

Through Ottoman, trade, and scholarly networks, Māturīdī influence also reached:

- The Balkans
- Parts of North Africa
- The Caucasus
- The Volga–Ural region (Tatars and Bashkirs)
- Western China (Turkic Muslim regions)

In each area, the school adapted to local culture while retaining its essential theological identity. This global diffusion shows that the

Māturīdī creed was not bound by geography — it was embraced wherever Muslims sought a theology of balance, transcendence, and intellectual coherence.

6. Why It Spread: The Secret of Its Endurance

The spread of Māturīdism was not merely political — it was intellectual and spiritual. It endured because it offered:

- **Balance** — between reason and revelation
- **Stability** — against confusion and extremism
- **Orthodoxy** — rooted in Qur'ān and Sunnah
- **Depth** — capable of answering thinkers, philosophers, and skeptics
- **Compatibility** — with Ḥanafī legal methodology and global Muslim life

This made it a creed that could travel across cultures and centuries without losing its integrity.

Conclusion of Chapter 6

From Samarqand to Istanbul, from Bukhārā to Delhi, from the Silk Road to the Subcontinent, the Māturīdī school became one of the two great theological pillars of Sunni Islam. Its spread is evidence of its strength — a strength rooted not in power or politics, but in clarity, discipline, and truth.

Chapter 7 — His Timeless Legacy in Sunni Thought

Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī's influence cannot be measured merely by the details of his biography, nor by the small circle of students who sat at his feet in Samarqand. His true legacy is his *intellectual footprint* — a theological framework that protected Sunni creed, shaped the spirituality and worldview of entire civilizations, and continues to offer guidance in the face of modern confusion. His impact is not confined to the past; it is *alive, operative, and urgently relevant*.

1. A Theological Shield for the Ummah

Imām al-Māturīdī provided Sunni Islam with a theology capable of defending itself against:

- philosophical speculation,
- sectarian deviation,
- literalist anthropomorphism,
- and moral or intellectual skepticism.

He built a system in which:

- **belief is rationally defensible,**
- **revelation is supreme and coherent,**
- **the intellect is honoured but disciplined,**
- **God is transcendent yet truly described,**
- **and free will exists without denying divine decree.**

His theology became a *shield* — protecting the community from extremes that threatened to shatter the unity of creed.

2. A Companion School to the Ashʿarīs

Alongside Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, Imām al-Māturīdī stands as one of the *two imams* of orthodox Sunni theology. The Ummah for over a thousand years recognized:

- **Ashʿarīs and Māturīdīs as twin defenders of Ahl al-Sunnah.**

Their differences are nuanced, not foundational. Their purpose is identical: to preserve *tawḥīd*, protect transcendence (*tanzīh*), and safeguard the revelation from distortion. The Sunni world remained united under these two schools because both guarded the same aqīdah using principled methodologies.

It is impossible to discuss Sunni creed, the Golden Age of Islamic scholarship, or the intellectual architecture of classical Islam without acknowledging Imām al-Māturīdī's role. His legacy is part of the Ummah's doctrinal DNA.

3. The Creed of Scholars, Jurists, and Civilizations

For centuries, the greatest scholars of the Ḥanafī world — jurists, judges, theologians, Sufis, linguists, philosophers, and statesmen — were steeped in the Māturīdī tradition. His creed shaped:

- **Ottoman scholarship**
- **Mughal and Indo-Islamic institutions**
- **Central Asian madrasahs**
- **The Balkans and Anatolia**

- **Turkic and Persian Muslim intellectual life**

This was not accidental. Scholars embraced Māturīdism because it offered:

- *spiritual depth without mysticism replacing creed,*
- *intellectual confidence without rationalism replacing revelation,*
- *and theological clarity without rigidity.*

It produced generations of balanced scholars who could preach to the masses, teach in madrasahs, advise rulers, and debate philosophers — without losing the soul of Islam.

4. A Theology that Inspires, Not Intimidates

Al-Māturīdī's method does not suffocate the mind or demand blind acceptance. Instead, it *invites the believer to think*, to reflect on creation, to question assumptions, and to arrive at certainty through understanding. His approach reflects the Qur'ānic rhythm:

- ***afalā yaʿqilūn (will you not reason?),***
- ***afalā tatafakkarūn (will you not reflect?),***
- ***afalā tubṣirūn (will you not see?).***

His theology gave *dignity* to the intellect without turning it into an idol. It allowed Islam to engage the world — science, philosophy, culture, and civilization — without fear.

In this lies part of his timeless appeal: he made faith *approachable*, *defensible*, and *spiritually nourishing*.

5. A Legacy of Balance — The Middle Path Preserved

Every theological error, past or present, ultimately leans toward one of two extremes:

- **Unrestrained rationalism** (where reason overpowers revelation)
- **Rigid literalism** (where text is stripped of depth and transcendence)

Imām al-Māturīdī preserved the *middle path* — the path of the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the early scholars — where:

- reason and revelation walk together,
- transcendence and affirmation are harmonized,
- and faith satisfies both the heart and the intellect.

This balance is why his thought endured when others faded.

Conclusion of Chapter 7

The legacy of Imām al-Māturīdī is not confined to libraries or the pages of ancient manuscripts. It lives in the creed of millions of Muslims, in the institutions that shaped Sunni history, and in the minds of scholars who continue to defend Islam today. His theology is a living inheritance — one that offers clarity in confusion, moderation amidst extremism, and certainty in an age of doubt.

He remains, in every sense, *a timeless architect of Islamic creed*.

Chapter 8 — The Theological Vision of Imām al-Māturīdī

At the heart of Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī's contribution stands a clear theological vision: to preserve the purity of *tawḥīd*, protect the transcendence (*tanzīh*) of God, and uphold the harmony between reason and revelation. He did not merely argue against deviance — he *built a worldview*. His theology is not a collection of scattered refutations or abstract propositions; it is a *coherent, principled, and holistic system* designed to safeguard faith for both the scholar and the common believer.

For al-Māturīdī, theology (*ʿaqīdah*) was ultimately in service of three goals:

1. **To know Allah as He truly is** — One, Unique, Eternal, and utterly unlike His creation.
2. **To understand revelation in a way consistent with reason, language, and transcendence.**
3. **To protect the believer from confusion, extremism, and anthropomorphic imagination.**

His method can be summarized in a single sentence:

Affirm the revelation, deny all likeness, and use reason to defend what God has revealed.

1. The Qur'ān as Theological Foundation

Imām al-Māturīdī insisted that *the Qur'ān is the starting point, the reference point, and the final boundary of creed*. Nothing may override it — not philosophy, not excessive literalism, not speculative imagination. His tafsīr, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*, demonstrates that every theological principle of his school is rooted in revelation, not borrowed from foreign systems.

When the Qur'ān proclaims:

- **"Say: He is Allah, the One." (112:1)** — this defines the essence of *tawḥīd*.
- **"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him." (42:11)** — this defines *tanzīh*.
- **"Do they not reflect?" (59:21)** — this legitimizes *ʿaql (reason)* as a tool for faith.

Thus, revelation and reflection are not rivals — they are partners.

2. Reason as a Trusted Instrument

Al-Māturīdī's confidence in the intellect is one of the defining features of his theology. He viewed reason as:

- A *witness* to God's existence,
- A *path* to moral truths,
- A *condition* for religious responsibility (taklīf),
- And a *defense* against literalist distortion and philosophical excess.

However, reason is not independent. It walks *behind* revelation, not in front of it. His balance is precise:

- **He opposed the Muʿtazilah** for making reason the judge *over* revelation.
- **He opposed the extreme literalists** for silencing reason *beneath* revelation.

His position instead was:

Reason interprets revelation; revelation guides reason.

This harmony is one of the greatest strengths of the Māturīdī school.

3. The Core Tenets of Māturīdī Theology

The entire structure of Māturīdī theology rests on several principles which he viewed as the non-negotiable foundations of Sunnī belief:

- **Tawḥīd:** Allah is One, unique, without partner, likeness, form, or limitation.
- **Tanzīh:** Allah is absolutely transcendent — beyond direction, body, place, change, or imagination.
- **Affirmation Without Anthropomorphism:** All attributes revealed by Allah are real and eternal, but none resemble the attributes of creation.
- **Divine Justice and Wisdom:** Allah does not wrong His servants and acts with purpose and wisdom.
- **Human Responsibility:** Humans possess real choice and are accountable, even though their actions occur by Allah's creation and will.
- **Qadar with Accountability:** Destiny does not negate moral responsibility, and responsibility does not negate divine decree.

- **Revelation as Guide, Reason as Lamp:** Revelation is the supreme authority; reason is its interpreter.
- **Prophethood as Necessity:** The human mind can know God exists, but cannot know how to worship Him without revelation.
- **Religion and Intellect Are Compatible:** Islam is a faith that withstands inquiry, not one that fears it.

Through these pillars, Māturīdī ʿaqīdah offers a creed that is both **orthodox and intellectually satisfying**.

4. Protecting Tawḥīd from Two Historical Extremes

Al-Māturīdī identified two recurring threats to pure monotheism:

- **Excessive rationalism** that *empties* God of His attributes in the name of transcendence (e.g., the Muʿtazilah).
- **Crude literalism** that *embodies* God with human-like qualities in the name of affirmation (e.g., the Hashawiyyah and early anthropomorphists).

The first makes God unknowable; the second makes God resemble His creation.

The Māturīdī path is the Qur'ānic middle way:

"Nothing is like Him — and He is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing." (42:11) (Affirmation + Transcendence)

This verse is the theological manifesto of the school.

5. A Theology for Hearts and Minds Alike

Al-Māturīdī did not build a creed for philosophers only. His theology:

- satisfies the *ʿālim* (scholar),

- reassures the *ʿābid* (worshipper),
- and protects the *ʿāmmi* (ordinary believer).

It is faith with depth, not dryness — intellect with humility, not arrogance.

Conclusion of Chapter 8

Imām al-Māturīdī's vision is a *unified theological project*: protect Allah's transcendence, affirm His attributes truthfully, harmonize revelation and intellect, and safeguard the Ummah from extremes. With this vision, he laid the groundwork for one of the most enduring expressions of Sunnī creed in history.

Chapter 9 — Tawḥīd and the Transcendence of God

At the heart of Imām al-Māturīdī's creed stands *tawḥīd* — the absolute oneness, uniqueness, and incomparability of Allāh. Tawḥīd is not merely a statement of number ("one versus many"), but a statement of reality: **there is nothing like Him, nothing that confines Him, nothing that resembles Him, and nothing that limits Him.** He is One in His Essence, One in His Lordship, One in His right to be worshipped, and utterly unlike His creation in every sense.

The Qur'ān establishes this truth with decisive clarity:

"Say: He is Allah, One." (Qur'ān 112:1)
"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him." (Qur'ān 42:11)

These verses are the theological compass of Islam. They do not merely inform — they *govern* every other discussion of creed.

1. Allah Exists Without Place, Direction, or Form

Imām al-Māturīdī and the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah taught that **Allah existed before the Throne, before the heavens, before space, and before direction — and He is now exactly as He always was.** Place is a *created thing*. Direction is a *created concept*. The Throne is a *created object*. The One who creates cannot be confined by what He creates, nor dependent on it.

The Qur'ān declares:

"He is the First and the Last." (Qur'ān 57:3)

Before there was "up" or "down," before east or west, before the sky or the Throne — Allah *was*. To say that Allah is "above" in a physical sense, or "sitting" in a location, is to imply that He is contained, positioned, or surrounded by space. But whatever is surrounded, contained, or positioned is *limited* — and the Limited cannot be the Eternal.

Thus, the Māturīdī school teaches:

- Allah is **not a body**,
- Allah is **not in a direction**,
- Allah is **not in a place**,
- Allah is **not subject to movement, change, or boundaries**.

For the One who created place *cannot* be in need of it.

2. The Throne (ʿArsh) — Dominion, Not Location

Some verses speak of Allāh "establishing Himself over the Throne" (*istiwāʾ ʿalā al-ʿarsh*). The early Sunni scholars, including al-Māturīdī, affirmed every word of these verses **without imagining any bodily sitting, settling, rising, or movement.**

They understood:

- The Throne is the greatest of created things.
- Its mention signifies *Allah's dominion, authority, and sovereignty* — not a physical seat.

For if one imagines Allah "sitting" or "occupying" space, he has contradicted the verse:

"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him." (42:11)

Imām al-Māturīdī's method is simple and unshakeable:

Affirm the verse — deny all physical resemblance — and interpret in a way that preserves transcendence.

This is *tawḥīd with tanzīh*, not tawḥīd with imagination.

3. Literalism and the Danger of Bodily Theology

A key threat to transcendent tawḥīd in every era is *hyper-literalism* — reading metaphorical or ambiguous verses as physical descriptions. Such readings lead to a God who "sits," "moves," "descends," "occupies a direction," or "needs a location." This theology collapses tawḥīd by portraying the Creator in the image of creation.

If someone says:

- **"Allah is literally above, in a place"**
- **"Allah literally sits on the Throne"**
- **"Allah has a literal hand, face, or limb"**

Then he has — perhaps unintentionally — attributed body, direction, limitation, and form to Allah. This contradicts both reason and revelation.

The Māturīdī school protected the Ummah from this error by insisting that:

- **Bodily imagery is impossible for God.**
- **Verses about attributes must be understood in a manner befitting His majesty.**
- **Ambiguous wording (mutashābih) must be approached with discipline, not imagination.**

This is not denial — it is *purification* of tawḥīd.

4. Reason Confirms What Revelation Declares

Sound intellect agrees with revelation on this matter:

- Whatever occupies space is a body.
- Whatever is in a direction is confined.
- Whatever is confined is limited.
- Whatever is limited is contingent.
- Whatever is contingent cannot be divine.

Thus, reason itself proves:

The Creator of space cannot be in space.

Imām al-Māturīdī used *ʿaql* to defend *naql*, never to override it. His theology resonates with both the heart and the mind because it flows from both *Qur'ān* and *reason* in harmony.

5. Tawḥīd as Worldview

For al-Māturīdī, tawḥīd was not only a creed of God — it was a *way of seeing existence*. It means:

- Only Allah is absolute — everything else is dependent.
- Only Allah is eternal — everything else is created.
- Only Allah is perfect — everything else is limited.

This worldview liberates the mind from superstition and anthropomorphism, and fills the heart with reverence, humility, and certainty.

Conclusion of Chapter 9

Imām al-Māturīdī preserved the *purity of divine transcendence*. He taught that Allah is One without likeness, Eternal without direction, and Near without place. His tawḥīd is the tawḥīd of the Qur'ān — a theology that exalts God beyond imagination while affirming everything He revealed about Himself.

Chapter 10 — The Divine Attributes: Affirmation Without Anthropomorphism

The most sensitive and delicate area of Islamic creed is the discussion of Allāh's Attributes (*ṣifāt*). Throughout history, errors in this single subject led entire sects astray — some by denial, others by literalism, and others by philosophical exaggeration. Imām al-Māturīdī's approach became a beacon of balance. His theology affirmed everything Allāh revealed about Himself, while rejecting every attempt to liken the Creator to the creation.

The Qur'ān lays down the decisive principle that governs all discussion of divine attributes:

"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing." (Qur'ān 42:11)

This single verse contains both pillars of Sunni theology:

1. **Tanzīh (Transcendence)** — *"There is nothing like Him"* — denying all bodily, spatial, or human-like interpretation.
2. **Ithbāt (Affirmation)** — *"He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing"* — affirming the attributes that He revealed about Himself.

This is the Qur'ānic balance: *neither negation nor anthropomorphism.*

1. The Māturīdī Method: Affirm, Don't Resemble

Imām al-Māturīdī insisted on three rules when approaching verses and ḥadīth about divine attributes:

- **Affirm the wording as revealed** — because Allāh spoke the truth.

- **Deny all bodily or human-like meaning** — because likeness contradicts tawḥīd.
- **Interpret in a manner befitting God** (either by *tafwīḍ* or *taʾwīl*) — to protect transcendence and coherence.

This protects creed from two extremes:

- **The Muʿtazilah**, who denied or emptied the attributes to "protect transcendence,"
- **The literalists**, who imposed limbs, direction, or physicality in the name of "affirmation."

The Māturīdī school rejected both, and upheld the Qur'ānic middle path.

2. The Seven Essential (Eternal) Attributes

Māturīdī theologians affirmed seven *essential* eternal attributes that must be affirmed for Allāh:

- **Life (al-Ḥayāt)**
- **Knowledge (al-ʿIlm)**
- **Will (al-Irādah)**
- **Power (al-Qudrah)**
- **Hearing (as-Samʿ)**
- **Sight (al-Baṣar)**
- **Speech (al-Kalām)**

These seven are not random or speculative — they are the minimum rational and textual necessities for describing a perfect, eternal Creator. Without Life, He would not be Living. Without Knowledge and Power, He could not create. Without Will, nothing would be determined. Without Speech, revelation would be meaningless. Without Hearing and

Sight, He would be negated of perception that the Qur'ān explicitly affirms.

The Māturīdīs affirm these attributes:

- **as real, eternal, and uncreated**, and
- **utterly unlike the attributes of human beings or bodies.**

Allāh sees without eyes. Allāh hears without ears. Allāh speaks without voice, letter, or sound. The attributes are true — but the "how" (*kayf*) is unknowable.

3. The Eighth Eternal Attribute: Takwīn (Bringing-Into-Existence)

One of the distinctive contributions of the Māturīdī school is the affirmation of **an eighth eternal attribute**:

- **al-Takwīn** — the attribute by which Allāh brings creation from non-existence into existence.

This attribute explains that:

- Allāh is eternally the Creator, not "becoming" a creator in time;
- His creative power is eternal, while *the effects* of creation unfold in time.

Other schools explained "creation" merely as an action arising from Power and Will. Imām al-Māturīdī rejected this, because it implies change and temporality. He instead affirmed:

The attribute is eternal, its effects occur in time.

This protects Allāh's transcendence from temporality, while affirming His continual creative act.

4. Why Māturīdīs Limit Enumeration

Although revelation contains many divine names and attributes — mercy, generosity, wisdom, majesty, glory, etc. — the Māturīdī school limits *technical enumeration* to these foundational attributes to avoid:

- Multiplying eternal attributes without necessity,
- Falling into philosophical contradiction,
- or confusing the believer with categories that imply plurality in the Divine Essence.

However:

All divine names in Qurʾān and Sunnah are affirmed — but traced back to the foundational attributes that uphold tawḥīd.

Enumeration is for *clarity*, not limitation. Allāh's perfection is infinite.

5. Refuting the Claim: "Māturīdīs Deny the Attributes"

Some literalists accuse the Māturīdī school of "denying" the attributes of Allāh. This is false. In reality:

- Māturīdīs affirm every attribute that Allāh affirms,
- Reject every interpretation that implies body, form, limb, or direction,
- And therefore protect the very transcendence those critics unknowingly violate.

It is not denial to refuse anthropomorphism. It is *pure tawḥīd*.

Conclusion of Chapter 10

Imām al-Māturīdī preserved the divine attributes with reverence, precision, and discipline. He affirmed what revelation affirms, while rejecting the imagination's attempts to drag the divine down into physical imagery. His theology ensures that Allah is known truly and worshipped correctly — as the Eternal, the Living, the Powerful, the Hearing, the Seeing, and the Speaking — **without likeness, limit, or form.**

Chapter 11 — Divine Justice and Wisdom

A central pillar of Imām al-Māturīdī's theology is the conviction that **Allah is perfectly just and infinitely wise**, and that nothing in creation is random, purposeless, or unjust. Divine justice (*ʿadālah*) and divine wisdom (*ḥikmah*) are not peripheral themes in Māturīdī creed — they are foundational truths that shape how the believer understands God, destiny, responsibility, morality, and the entire human condition.

The Qur'ān repeatedly affirms:

"Indeed, Allah does not wrong even the weight of an atom." (Qur'ān 4:40)

"Your Lord is never unjust to His servants." (Qur'ān 41:46)

These verses form the bedrock of the Māturīdī understanding of justice: **Allah does not wrong, Allah does not act without purpose, and Allah does not burden beyond capacity.**

1. Justice as a Divine Attribute Recognized by Revelation and Reason

Imām al-Māturīdī affirmed that justice is both:

- **revealed** (known through the Qur'ān and Sunnah), and
- **rational** (recognizable to the human mind).

He rejected the notion that good and evil are purely arbitrary or unknowable without revelation. Instead, he taught:

- The intellect can recognize some moral truths on its own (e.g., honesty is good, oppression is evil).
- Revelation *confirms, completes, and perfects* what reason begins.

Thus, in the Māturīdī worldview:

- **Reason testifies to Allah's justice**, and
- **Revelation explains its details**.

This stands in contrast to those who claimed that justice has no meaning except "whatever God wills" — a view that strips morality of coherence and turns accountability into absurdity. Māturīdī theology protects the believer from this philosophical trap by upholding justice as a *real and meaningful attribute*.

2. Divine Wisdom and the Purpose of Creation

The Māturīdī school rejects any suggestion that Allah acts "without reason" or "without wisdom." Every divine action has purpose, even if that purpose is beyond human reach.

The Qur'ān declares:

"We did not create the heavens and the earth in vain." (Qur'ān 38:27)

Creation is neither cosmic accident nor divine play. It is the unfolding of wisdom. Imām al-Māturīdī emphasized that:

- Allah creates with intention, not chaos.
- Shariah commands and prohibitions are rooted in wisdom, not arbitrariness.
- Reward and punishment are just, because responsibility is real.

Nothing Allah wills is without meaning — even when His wisdom is hidden from the human eye.

3. No Burden Beyond Capacity

Another essential principle is that Allah never imposes obligations that exceed a person's ability. The Qur'ān states:

"Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity." (Qur'ān 2:286)

From this, Imām al-Māturīdī deduced:

- Accountability (*taklīf*) is based on ability.
- A morally responsible human being must possess reason, will, and capacity.
- Punishment without real choice is incompatible with divine justice.

In this way, the Māturīdī school preserves both **fairness** and **responsibility** in theology.

4. Divine Justice Without Limiting Divine Power

Imām al-Māturīdī's affirmation of justice never compromises Allah's omnipotence. Allah is All-Powerful (*al-Qadīr*) — He can do whatever He wills. But His will is not random, chaotic, or unprincipled.

The balance is clear:

- Allah can do all things (absolute power),
- But Allah does not act unjustly (perfect justice),
- Nor without wisdom (perfect purpose).

Therefore:

- **Power without justice is tyranny — impossible for Allah.**
- **Power without wisdom is chaos — impossible for Allah.**

Māturīdī theology thus avoids two extremes:

- The fatalistic view that strips actions of purpose,
- The rationalist view that judges Allah by human moral frameworks.

5. A Foundation for the Next Pillar: Human Responsibility

By grounding theology in divine justice, Imām al-Māturīdī prepared the way for a coherent doctrine of **free will, qadar, and accountability** — which will form the subject of the next chapter. Because if Allah is just:

- Humans must have meaningful choice,
- Accountability must have rational basis,
- Destiny must coexist with responsibility.

This is why divine justice is not an abstract idea — it is the *moral spine* of Islamic theology.

Conclusion of Chapter 11

Imām al-Māturīdī's articulation of Allah's justice and wisdom provides the believer with clarity, comfort, and certainty. Allah does not wrong, does not act without purpose, does not burden beyond ability, and does not contradict the moral truths He Himself placed into the human heart. His justice ennobles the human being, and His wisdom gives meaning to existence.

Chapter 12 — Human Free Will, Qadar, and Accountability

The question of human action — how it relates to destiny, responsibility, reward, punishment, and Divine will — sits at the heart of theological debate. Entire sects splintered over this issue. Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī addressed it with clarity and balance, protecting both Allah's absolute sovereignty and the human being's moral responsibility. His solution stands between two destructive extremes and remains the most coherent Sunni formulation to this day.

The Qur'ān affirms both Divine decree and human choice:

"Indeed, We created all things according to a decree." (54:49)

"Whoever wills — let him believe; and whoever wills — let him disbelieve." (18:29)

Both verses are true, and both must be held together. Where deviant sects clung to one and denied the other, the Māturīdī school *harmonized what the Qur'ān harmonized*.

1. The Two Historical Extremes

Imām al-Māturīdī confronted two misguided theological camps:

- **The Jabriyyah** — who claimed that humans have *no real choice*, reducing human beings to helpless objects. This view destroys accountability, makes sin and worship meaningless, and contradicts divine justice.

- **The Qadariyyah / Muʿtazilah** — who claimed that humans *create their own actions independently*. This grants humans a share in divine attributes and compromises tawḥīd by making the servant a "creator" alongside the Creator.

Both positions contradict revelation, reason, and the moral order that Islam requires.

2. The Māturīdī Middle Path: Real Choice, Created Action

Imām al-Māturīdī established the middle path:

- **Allah creates the act, but the human being chooses it.**
- **Allah grants ability, but the human being directs that ability toward obedience or disobedience.**
- **Allah decrees the range of possibilities, but the servant selects his path within that range.**

In short:

- The *power*, *capacity*, *time*, *circumstances*, and *existence* of every action are created by Allah.
- The *decision* to do good or evil belongs to the human heart and will.

This gives the human being **real moral agency**, without ever escaping Allah's sovereignty.

3. Accountability (Taklīf) Requires True Moral Agency

Allah commands, forbids, promises reward, and warns of punishment. Such communication is only meaningful if humans possess genuine choice. The Qur'ān states:

"Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it." (99:7–8)

Thus, Māturīdī theology teaches that accountability is built on three pillars:

- **Ability (qudrah)**
- **Will (irādah)**
- **Choice (ikhtiyār)**

If any of these are removed, accountability collapses — and that would contradict divine justice, which the Qur'ān emphatically upholds.

4. Qadar Without Fatalism, Free Will Without Arrogance

The Qur'ānic worldview that Imām al-Māturīdī articulated creates a healthy spiritual balance:

- The believer works, strives, and chooses — because their decisions matter.
- The believer trusts, surrenders, and accepts — because Allah's decree surrounds and encompasses all things.

This protects a Muslim from two spiritual diseases:

- **Fatalism** — the idea that effort is meaningless (leading to despair or laziness).
- **Arrogance** — the idea that success is self-made (leading to pride and heedlessness).

In Māturīdī creed:

The heart relies on Allah, but the limbs continue to act.

5. The Wisdom of Decree

Divine decree (*qadar*) is not chaos and not compulsion. Its wisdom includes:

- teaching humility,
- nurturing trust (tawakkul),
- encouraging effort,
- and preventing pride.

The believer walks through life knowing:

- *"What is for me will never miss me."*
- *"Yet I remain responsible for my choices."*

This worldview produces serenity: striving without anxiety, trusting without passivity.

Conclusion of Chapter 12

Imām al-Māturīdī preserved the Qur'ānic harmony between destiny and freedom. Allah decrees, yet man chooses. Allah creates, yet man is responsible. This balance safeguards both *divine justice* and *human dignity*, and it provides the believer with clarity, purpose, and peace in navigating the moral life.

Chapter 13 — Prophethood and the Necessity of Revelation

The human being is a creature of intellect, but also of limitation. Through reason, we can discover patterns, infer causes, and recognize moral truths; yet reason on its own cannot answer the most decisive questions of existence. It cannot tell us **why** we exist, **what** our purpose is, **what lies beyond death**, or **what God desires from us**. Left unaided, the mind can search, but it cannot arrive with certainty. It can speculate about the Divine, but it cannot speak on His behalf.

For this reason, revelation is not a luxury — it is a necessity.

Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī emphasized that prophethood (*nubuwwah*) is a pillar of divine mercy and an essential component of the moral order. He argued that since Allah created rational beings with purpose, it follows that He must guide them to that purpose. To create humanity without guidance would contradict divine wisdom, and to hold humanity accountable without communication would contradict divine justice. Thus, revelation is both **logically necessary** and **theologically inevitable**.

The Qur'ān confirms this truth repeatedly:

"Messengers as bringers of good news and warners, so that mankind would have no argument against Allah after the messengers." (4:165)

This verse was central to Māturīdī thought. It establishes that prophetic revelation is what completes the proof against mankind. Without

prophets, moral responsibility (*taklīf*) would be unjust, and judgment would be baseless.

1. Why Prophets Are Necessary

Imām al-Māturīdī taught that the need for prophets arises from five fundamental realities:

- **Human reason can identify a Creator, but not the specifics of worship.**
- **Ethics require precision, not guesswork.**
- **The unseen cannot be known without disclosure.**
- **Salvation demands certainty, not speculation.**
- **A universal moral law must come from a universal source.**

In other words, reason is a compass — but not a map. Revelation is the map: clear, detailed, and divinely authored. The prophet is the guide who teaches humanity how to walk the path.

2. The Role of the Prophet in Māturīdī Theology

According to Imām al-Māturīdī, the mission of a prophet has three inseparable functions:

- **To convey the message (tablīgh)** — delivering revelation exactly as received.
- **To clarify and interpret (bayān)** — teaching its meanings, applications, and wisdoms.
- **To exemplify (uswah)** — living the revelation so that guidance becomes visible.

The Qur'ān stresses all three functions. Regarding conveyance:

"Your duty is only to convey (the message) clearly." (16:82)

Regarding clarification:

"…so that you may make clear to mankind what has been revealed to them." (16:44)

And regarding example:

"Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have a perfect model." (33:21)

Thus, prophethood is not only an institution of instruction, but also one of embodiment. The Prophet does not merely *teach* the Straight Path — he *walks* it before the eyes of humanity.

3. The Infallibility (ʿIsmah) of the Prophets

Because prophets are the vessels of revelation, Imām al-Māturīdī affirmed, like all Sunni theologians, that they are protected from major sin and from error in conveying the message. If prophets could lie, betray, or distort, then revelation would lose authority and certainty would collapse. Their infallibility is therefore a mercy, not an exaggeration.

The Qur'ān describes them as:

"…those whom Allah has guided, so follow their guidance." (6:90)

Guidance cannot come from those who are misguided; thus, infallibility in their mission is a rational and scriptural necessity.

4. Prophethood as a Manifestation of Divine Justice and Mercy

Māturīdī theology aligns prophethood with Allah's names:

- It reflects His **justice** — by ensuring accountability is based on knowledge.

- It reflects His **mercy** — by providing guidance before punishment.
- It reflects His **wisdom** — by creating means for humanity to fulfill their purpose.

If Allah willed only to command, He could have simply judged without teaching. But He willed to guide before judging — and this is mercy.

5. The Finality of Prophethood and the Universality of Islam

The coming of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, according to Imām al-Māturīdī, was the culmination of the prophetic mission:

"Muḥammad is not the father of any man among you, but the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets." (33:40)

With finality came universality — one law for all humankind, one Messenger for all nations, and one Revelation preserved until the end of time. Māturīdī scholars stressed that final revelation required both **perfect preservation** and **universal intelligibility**, and this is exactly what the Qur'ān achieved.

Conclusion of Chapter 13

Revelation is the light, and reason is the eye. An eye without light sees nothing, and light without an eye benefits nothing. Prophethood unites the two, giving humanity a path to God that is both intelligible and certain. For Imām al-Māturīdī, this harmony was a cornerstone of creed and a pillar of divine wisdom.

Chapter 14 — Epistemology: How We Know What We Know

Every theological system rests on an epistemology — a theory of knowledge. Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī distinguished himself by articulating one of the most balanced and sophisticated epistemological frameworks in Sunni history. Unlike philosophers who exalted the intellect until it overshadowed revelation, and unlike literalists who restricted knowledge to transmitted texts alone, al-Māturīdī affirmed a harmony between the mind and Revelation. In his view, **Allah created both the intellect and revelation as pathways to truth, not as rivals to one another**.

The Qur'ān appeals constantly to the reasoning mind, commanding reflection, contemplation, and analysis. At the same time, it provides truths that reason alone could never uncover — realities concerning the unseen, the soul, the afterlife, divine attributes, and cosmic purpose. Thus, for Māturīdī theology, true knowledge (*ʿilm*) is acquired through **three interdependent sources**:

1. **The Intellect (al-ʿAql)**
2. **Revelation (al-Waḥy)**
3. **Authentic Transmission (al-Khabar al-Ṣādiq)**

These three sources form a **single epistemological triangle**. If one side is missing, knowledge becomes lopsided — purely rational, purely literalist, or purely speculative. With all three in place, the believer sees with clarity, thinks with discipline, and worships with understanding.

1. The Role of the Intellect — A Gift that Recognizes, Not Invents

In Māturīdī theology, the intellect is a God-given faculty that allows humans to recognize the existence of their Creator, discern basic moral truths, and infer order, purpose, and design in the world. Before revelation arrives, the mind can already know that lying is blameworthy, justice is noble, gratitude is obligatory, and that a wise Creator must exist.

This is why the Qur'ān asks:

"Do they not use their reason?" (2:44)

"Indeed, in this are signs for a people who reflect." (30:24)

The mind, however, can only begin the journey — it cannot complete it. It recognizes the necessity of a Creator, but cannot determine *how* to worship Him. It perceives moral duty, but cannot define the boundaries of law. It senses the unseen, but cannot describe its details. The intellect is a compass, not a map. It points in the right direction, but it cannot draw the destination.

2. Revelation — Light That Perfects the Work of the Intellect

Revelation (*waḥy*) is the second and supreme source of knowledge. It delivers truths beyond the reach of human speculation: the nature of God, the reality of the hereafter, the unseen world, the specifics of worship, divine law, prophecy, salvation, and ultimate purpose. Revelation does not cancel reason — it completes it.

The Qur'ān describes itself as:

"Guidance, light, and a criterion." (2:185)

Thus, revelation becomes the final authority and the ultimate corrective. When the intellect is uncertain, revelation clarifies. When the intellect is limited, revelation expands. When the intellect wanders, revelation anchors it. But because Islam is not a blind creed, revelation also *invites* rational engagement:

"So give glad tidings to My servants, those who listen to the word and follow the best of it." (39:17–18)

This verse is a manifesto for the Māturīdī method: revelation invites thinking, and thinking leads to deeper revelation.

3. Authentic Transmission — Protecting Truth Across Time

The third epistemic pillar is *al-khabar al-ṣādiq* — the truthful, reliable reports transmitted by the Ummah. Revelation reaches us through transmission, and the Sunnah is preserved by isnād. The Māturīdī school defended the authority of **mutawātir transmission**, affirming that what has been conveyed by numerous trustworthy chains cannot be false.

This protects the Ummah from:

- innovation in creed
- distortions of scripture
- fabricated doctrines
- personal reinterpretations masked as religion

Where atheists rely on speculation and literalists rely on surface readings, Māturīdīs rely on *authenticated knowledge rooted in an unbroken chain*.

The Harmony of the Three Sources

Imām al-Māturīdī insisted that when properly understood:

- **Reason will never contradict authentic revelation**, because both are from Allah.
- **Transmission preserves**, **revelation illuminates**, and **reason interprets**.

If a contradiction seems to appear between reason and revelation, then either:

1. the reasoning is faulty,
2. or the interpretation of the text is incorrect.

Truth itself does not conflict with truth.

Conclusion of Chapter 14

By constructing an epistemology rooted in reason, revelation, and authentic transmission, Imām al-Māturīdī secured the foundations of Sunni theology against confusion. His method prevents blind literalism on one side and reckless speculation on the other. It produces clarity without rigidity, depth without chaos, and certainty without intellectual suffocation. In Māturīdī theology, knowledge is not merely accumulated — it is *harmonized*, so that the believer may know Allah with both heart and mind.

Chapter 15 — The Qur’ānic Foundations of Māturīdī Theology

Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī did not construct theology from abstract speculation, Greek philosophy, or clever dialectic. His system was, at its core, an attempt to articulate — with precision, discipline, and structure — the very creed already present in the Qur’ān. Every pillar of Māturīdī ʿaqīdah is rooted in verses of divine speech. Where other sects exaggerated reason or clung to literal surfaces, the Imām returned insistently to the Qur’ān as the foundation of all theology. His kalām served the Qur’ān; it did not overshadow it.

Because the Qur’ān speaks in layers — clear and ambiguous, literal and metaphorical, spiritual and legal, rhetorical and rational — it requires a methodology that honours all its dimensions without betrayal or simplification. The Māturīdī method is precisely this: **to interpret the Qur’ān through the Qur’ān, to uphold what is definitive, and to handle what is ambiguous with reverence, intellect, and restraint.** This approach reveals eight core themes that form the backbone of Māturīdī creed.

1. Tawḥīd and Tanzīh — Allah’s Oneness, Unlikeness, and Transcendence

The central Qur’ānic message is that Allah is utterly One and utterly unlike His creation. He is unique in essence, attributes, actions, and divinity. Revelation declares:

“Say: He is Allah, One.” (112:1)

“There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him.” (42:11)

Here are the two foundations of theology: **affirmation** (ithbāt) and **transcendence** (tanzīh). The first establishes the existence and oneness of Allah; the second guards His perfection from anthropomorphism, form, direction, or limitation. This is the very heart of Māturīdī thought.

2. Affirming Attributes Without Anthropomorphism

The Qur’ān affirms attributes of knowledge, speech, power, hearing, sight, and will. It also negates any resemblance between the Creator and creation:

“He is All-Knowing, All-Wise.” (59:24)

“Vision cannot grasp Him, but He grasps all vision.” (6:103)

Thus, attributes are affirmed **without limbs, organs, dimensions, or “how.”** The Qur’ān protects transcendence before the theologian ever speaks.

3. Divine Justice and Wisdom

The Qur’ān repeatedly teaches that Allah acts with wisdom and never wrongs His servants:

“Your Lord is never unjust to His servants.” (41:46)

“Indeed Allah commands justice and excellence.” (16:90)

This forms the Māturīdī conviction that morality is real, objective, and intelligible. Allah does not command evil, nor is justice arbitrary.

4. Human Free Will and Responsibility

The Qur'ān affirms genuine moral responsibility:

"So whoever wills — let him believe; and whoever wills — let him disbelieve." (18:29)

"And We guided him to the two paths." (90:10)

This is the Qur'ānic root of Māturīdī belief in real human choice, without denying divine sovereignty.

5. Qadar and Divine Will

At the same time, the Qur'ān teaches that Allah's decree encompasses all things:

"Indeed, We have created all things according to a decree." (54:49)

"No calamity befalls except by the permission of Allah." (57:22)

Thus, the Māturīdī school affirms **both decree and responsibility without contradiction** — because the Qur'ān affirms both without contradiction.

6. The Role of the Intellect

The Qur'ān does not silence reason; it summons it:

"Will you not use your intellect?" (2:44)

"Indeed, in this are signs for a people who reflect." (30:24)

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth… are signs for people of understanding.” (3:190)

These verses form the epistemological backbone of the Māturīdī school. The Qur’ān itself commands thinking — so creed cannot forbid it.

7. Prophethood as Necessary Guidance

Without revelation, the intellect would remain incomplete. The Qur’ān states:

“Messengers as bringers of glad tidings and warners, so that mankind would have no argument against Allah after the messengers.” (4:165)

“We certainly sent to every nation a messenger.” (16:36)

This is the Qur’ānic foundation for Māturīdī doctrine on prophecy: **reason discovers the need for guidance, revelation provides it.**

8. Revelation as a Source of Certainty and Light

The Qur’ān describes itself as:

“Guidance for mankind.” (2:185)

“This Qur’ān guides to that which is most upright.” (17:9)

Thus, revelation is not blind instruction — it is illumination.

Conclusion of Chapter 15

Every pillar of Māturīdī theology — transcendence, attributes, justice, free will, decree, epistemology, prophecy, and revelation — rests openly

and explicitly on Qur'ānic foundations. Nothing is invented. Nothing is imported. Nothing is forced. The Qur'ān speaks, and the Māturīdī theologian merely organizes its message, protects it from distortion, and expresses it systematically in a world of competing claims.

In this way, the creed of Imām al-Māturīdī is not a theology built *beside* the Qur'ān. It is the Qur'ān itself — **structured, defended, and illuminated for the intellect of humankind.**

Chapter 16 — The Unity of Ahl al-Sunnah: Māturīdīs and Ashʿarīs as Twin Defenders of Orthodoxy

For over a thousand years, the mainstream creed of Sunni Islam was carried and defended by two great theological schools: the **Māturīdī** tradition of Samarqand and the **Ashʿarī** tradition of Basra and Baghdad. Together, they formed the intellectual and spiritual fortress of **Ahl al-Sunnah waʾl-Jamāʿah**, preserving the purity of Islamic belief from distortion, anthropomorphism, rational deviation, and foreign ideology. Their role in Islamic history is not accidental — it is providential. In an era of turmoil, Allah raised two men of depth, discipline, and sincerity, who would revive the creed of the Qurʾān and Sunnah, each in his own land, and each in his own style.

Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333 AH) and Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324 AH) never met in person, yet their missions were almost identical. They confronted similar enemies, defended the same creed, utilized similar proofs, and upheld the same principles of transcendence (tanzīh), orthodoxy, and reverence for Revelation. Their differences were not in **what** they believed, but in **how** they expressed and defended those beliefs. For this reason, the scholars of Sunni Islam unanimously recognized them as *two wings of the same bird* — distinct in articulation, united in essence.

The Enemies They Faced, They Faced Together

Both schools rose during an age of theological chaos. The Muslim world was under siege from:

- **The Muʿtazilah**, who exaggerated reason until revelation was subordinated to philosophy.
- **The Anthropomorphists**, who interpreted verses so literally that Allah was likened to His creation.
- **Esoteric groups**, who dissolved creed into mysticism without discipline.
- **Foreign philosophers**, who smuggled Greek metaphysics into Islamic theology.

The Māturīdīs and Ashʿarīs, independently yet harmoniously, restored the prophetic balance between mind and text, reason and revelation, transcendence and affirmation.

What They Shared

Despite regional differences and nuances in style, both schools agreed on every foundational doctrine of Ahl al-Sunnah:

- Allah is one, unique, and utterly unlike His creation
- His attributes are eternal, real, and without resemblance
- The Qur'ān is His uncreated speech
- He is free of body, form, direction, movement, and limitation
- Human beings possess real choice within divine decree
- Prophets are truthful, protected, and necessary as guides
- Revelation is the highest source of knowledge
- Reason is a tool of faith, not an enemy of it

This shared foundation is why the Sunni world embraced both schools as legitimate, orthodox, and authoritative. The Ottomans, the Seljuks, the Mughals, the scholars of Transoxiana, Damascus, Istanbul, Cairo, Delhi,

Bukhārā, Samarqand, and Nishapur — all stood upon the twin pillars of **Ashʿarī and Māturīdī creed**.

Their Differences: Refinements, Not Divisions

The differences between the two schools are **minor, non-foundational, and scholarly in nature** — such as how to classify certain attributes or articulate certain aspects of qadar. But these differences never divided the Ummah, never produced sectarian hostility, and never affected the oneness of Sunni identity. The scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah always knew the difference between **ikhtilāf al-tanawwuʿ (diversity of expression)** and **ikhtilāf al-taḍādd (contradiction)**. The Māturīdī-Ashʿarī difference is the former — variation within unity, not opposition.

A Historical Reality Modern Voices Have Forgotten

For a millennium, Sunni Muslims did not ask, "Are you Māturīdī or Ashʿarī?" They asked only, "Are you from Ahl al-Sunnah?" Because to be one was to be the other. Only in recent times — fueled by hyper-literalist movements and shallow readings — have some attempted to portray these two schools as rivals or deviations. This revisionist narrative has no basis in the history of Islam.

The consensus of Sunni scholarship is clear:

Ashʿarīs and Māturīdīs together represent the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamāʿah.

This unity is a mercy. It produced intellectual strength, spiritual depth, and civilizational confidence. It allowed Islam to develop a theology capable of answering challenges in every age — past, present, and future.

Conclusion of Chapter 16

The Ummah is strongest when it stands where it always stood: united upon the middle path, guided by revelation, illuminated by reason, and protected from extremism. The Māturīdī and Ashʿarī traditions are not two competing camps — they are two complementary articulations of one creed, defending one ummah, in the service of one Book, worshipping one Lord.

To honour them is to honour our history, our orthodoxy, and our theological identity as Sunni Muslims.

Chapter 17 — Affirming the Text Without Literalism: Protecting the Transcendence of Allah

No subject in theology requires more care, humility, and discipline than the verses and ḥadīth that speak about Allah's attributes. These texts are among the greatest treasures of revelation, but they are also among the most dangerous in the hands of the untrained. Throughout Islamic history, misinterpretation of such verses has led to extremes: some stripped God of His attributes entirely, while others imagined Him as a body occupying space. The Sunni tradition — preserved by the Māturīdīs and Ashʿarīs — charted the only safe path between these two cliffs: **affirmation without literalism, transcendence without negation.**

The Qur'ān and Sunnah speak to human beings in human language — a language built on metaphor, imagery, symbolism, idiom, and rhetorical expression. When the Qur'ān mentions the *Hand of Allah*, His *Face*, or His *establishing over the Throne*, the purpose is not to invite anatomical imagination. Rather, it is to convey meanings of power, authority, generosity, closeness, and sovereignty in terms that the human mind can comprehend — **without implying that Allah possesses limbs, organs, form, or dimension.**

The Qur'ān itself provides the rule by which these verses must be interpreted:

"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him." (42:11)

This is the governing āyah of theology — the boundary that protects tawḥīd from corruption. It means that whatever the believer affirms from revelation, he must never affirm it in a way that resembles creation. To read the *Hand* of Allah as a physical hand, the *Face* of Allah as a

physical face, or His *establishment over the Throne* as bodily sitting, is to contradict the Qur'ān's clearest principle.

Why Literalism Fails

Hyper-literalism collapses for three reasons:

1. **It contradicts the Qur'ān's own declaration of transcendence.**
   If nothing is like Him, then no bodily interpretation can be valid.
2. **It treats the language of revelation as crude, not elevated.**
   The Qur'ān is the most eloquent book — its metaphors are not threats to faith, but instruments of guidance.
3. **It turns verses of majesty into descriptions of anatomy.**
   This is not piety — it is a form of tashbīh (likening Allah to creation), even if unintentionally.

Anthropomorphism is not avoided merely by saying *"but not like our hand."* The problem is not similarity in *degree* — it is similarity in *kind*. Once Allah is imagined as a body in a direction, the essence of tawḥīd is compromised.

The Sunni Method: Three Golden Principles

The method of Ahl al-Sunnah, upheld by Imām al-Māturīdī and Imām al-Ashʿarī, rests on three principles:

1. **Affirmation (ithbāt):**
   We affirm every attribute that Allah affirms for Himself.
2. **Transcendence (tanzīh):**
   We categorically deny any implication of body, form, location, direction, or resemblance.

3. **Non-specification of 'how' (bilā kayf):**
   We do not attempt to imagine or define the modality of divine attributes.

These principles reflect the way of the Salaf, who said about such verses: *"Pass them as they came, without asking how and without likening."*

This is not avoidance — it is **adab before the Divine**.

Where Interpretation (Ta'wīl) Becomes Necessary

In verses where the literal meaning would violate transcendence, Ahl al-Sunnah permit **controlled, principled interpretation**. For example:

- *Hand* → power, authority, generosity
- *Face* → essence, presence, or divine countenance
- *Establishing over the Throne* → sovereignty, dominion, control

This is not distortion. It is fidelity to the Qur'ān's own command to avoid likeness. Ta'wīl, when used, is **a tool of protection, not manipulation.** It preserves transcendence where literalism would destroy it.

Conclusion of Chapter 17

Affirming the text is an obligation. Imagining Allah is a sin. The Sunni theological heritage — and especially the contribution of Imām al-Māturīdī — lies in protecting the Ummah from the spiritual and intellectual disasters that arise when revelation is read like a children's story or a physics manual. The Qur'ān is deeper than literalism and higher than imagination. To affirm without likening and to interpret without distortion — this is the balance of Ahl al-Sunnah, and the heart of Māturīdī theology.

Chapter 18 — Safeguarding the Creed from Extremes: Between Anthropomorphism and Denial

Theology collapses whenever balance is lost. If one leans too far toward unrestrained rationalism, revelation becomes subordinate to the mind, and the result is denial of the divine attributes. If one leans too far toward naive literalism, the mind is silenced and the Creator is imagined as a body, a shape, or a spatial being. Both extremes destroy tawḥīd — one by stripping Allah of His attributes, the other by distorting them. The Māturīdī school stands in the middle, protecting both the text and transcendence.

Historically, two extremes confronted Sunni orthodoxy:

1. **The Negators (Muʿaṭṭilah)** — who emptied Allah's attributes of meaning, claiming that affirming real attributes would compromise divine unity. In fleeing anthropomorphism, they fell into *taʿṭīl* (negation), making revelation seem hollow and reducing the attributes to mere metaphors.
2. **The Anthropomorphists (Mushabbihah/Mujassimah)** — who affirmed the attributes in a crude, literal sense, imagining Allah as possessing limbs, sitting, moving, ascending, descending, or existing in a direction. In affirming the text, they betrayed transcendence.

Between these two errors stood the path of **Ahl al-Sunnah** — the path of Imām al-Māturīdī and Imām al-Ashʿarī — who said:

- We **affirm** without **negation**
- We **believe** without **likening**

- We **accept** the wording without **imagining the modality**

This balance is not a compromise — it is the *original creed* of the earliest Muslims.

Why Negation Fails

Those who negate the attributes claim to defend transcendence, but their method contradicts revelation itself. If Allah repeatedly describes Himself as hearing, seeing, knowing, willing, and speaking — then to deny these attributes is to accuse the Qur'ān of speaking in illusions. The Muʿtazilah insisted that affirming eternal attributes would multiply "gods," but the Qur'ān says:

"He is All-Knowing, All-Powerful." (2:32, 2:20)

To deny the attributes is to deny what Allah affirmed. Revelation must lead reason — not the other way around.

Why Anthropomorphism Fails

On the opposite side, anthropomorphism destroys transcendence. It reads metaphor as anatomy, imagery as limbs, and majāz as machinery. Literalists claim this is "safer," but it is the greatest danger of all, because it projects human qualities onto the Creator. The Qur'ān answered this deviation before it existed:

"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him." (42:11)

A God who resembles creation is not worthy of worship. A God defined by direction, movement, or physicality is a god among bodies — not the Lord of the Worlds.

The Sunni Middle Path

The Māturīdī system protects tawḥīd by combining:

- **Affirmation (ithbāt):** accepting every revealed attribute
- **Tanzīh:** negating all resemblance to creation
- **Ta'wīl or Tafwīḍ:** interpreting appropriately or consigning the ultimate reality to Allah

This method:

- preserves the honour of revelation
- preserves the transcendence of Allah
- preserves the role of intellect

It is the only approach that keeps all three intact.

The Wisdom of the Middle Path

The balanced Sunni approach reflects three Qur'ānic truths:

1. **Allah has attributes** → because He affirmed them
2. **Allah is unlike His creation** → because He declared it
3. **Language has metaphor and depth** → because the Qur'ān uses it

The truth lies in holding these three together, not sacrificing one to preserve the others. Where the Negator sacrifices (1), and the Anthropomorphist sacrifices (2), and the Literalist ignores (3), the Māturīdī view upholds all three simultaneously.

Conclusion of Chapter 18

The Ummah is not destroyed by enemies outside as quickly as it is damaged by extremes within. Imām al-Māturīdī safeguarded Muslim creed by restoring equilibrium — affirming what must be affirmed, rejecting what must be rejected, and disciplining the mind so that neither arrogance nor naivety corrupts belief. This balance is the soul of Sunni theology, and it remains as urgently needed in our age as it was in his.

Chapter 19 — The Danger of Hyper-Literalism: When Text Is Used Without Method

Literalism presents itself as loyalty to revelation. It claims to "take the Qur'ān as it is" and "avoid interpretation." But when revelation is approached without method, context, or the guardrails of transcendence, literalism becomes one of the most dangerous forces in theology. It produces contradictions, invites anthropomorphism, and reduces the language of the Qur'ān to the level of crude, physical imagery. It is not submission to the text — it is submission to the surface of the text, at the expense of its meaning.

The Qur'ān is the most eloquent book in the Arabic language. Eloquence — by its nature — contains metaphor, imagery, emphasis, analogy, and rhetorical illustration. To insist that every verse must be read in its most literal, physical sense is to deny the very nature of the language Allah chose for His final revelation. Literalism, therefore, does not arise from piety — it arises from linguistic and theological immaturity.

Hyper-literalism fails for three fundamental reasons:

1. It Contradicts the Qur'ān's Own Method

The Qur'ān clearly states that revelation contains both **muḥkam** (decisive, clear) and **mutashābih** (ambiguous, layered) verses:

"It is He who has sent down to you the Book. In it are verses that are clear, they are the foundation of the Book; and others are ambiguous…" (Āl ʿImrān 3:7)

The Qur'ān itself declares that not every verse is to be read with a rigid surface meaning. Ambiguity (*tashābuh*) is part of revelation. Those who

insist that every divine attribute must be taken at its literal surface fall directly into the second half of the same verse, which warns:

"…As for those in whose hearts is deviation, they follow the ambiguous part…" (3:7)

Hyper-literalism is not Qur'ānic — it is the very behaviour the Qur'ān condemns.

2. It Opens the Door to Anthropomorphism (Tajsim and Tashbīh)

Literalism takes expressions like "Hand," "Face," "coming," "ascending," and "being above," and reads them as physical acts, spatial directions, or bodily features. Once Allah is imagined in physical terms — even subconsciously — transcendence collapses. The result is a deity who moves, sits, occupies space, and resembles creation in nature or dimension, even if the literalist verbally adds, "but not like us."

That verbal disclaimer does not undo the *mental image* created by literal reading.

Such an approach directly violates the verse:

"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him." (42:11)

Literalism claims to "affirm the text," yet it contradicts the *decisive verse* that governs every discussion of the divine attributes.

3. It Ignores the Reality of Language, Turning Revelation into Absurdity

Arabic — like every natural language — uses idiom and metaphor. The Qur'ān itself uses expressions that cannot be read literally:

- **"Allah forgets them"** (9:67) — literal reading implies ignorance and change

- **"Allah mocks them"** (2:15) — literal reading implies pettiness and reaction
- **"If you help Allah"** (47:7) — literal reading implies Allah is in need
- **"Who will lend Allah a goodly loan?"** (2:245) — literal reading implies poverty

If taken literally, these verses would violate tawḥīd, perfection, and transcendence. Thus, literalism leads either to **blasphemous meanings** or to **contradiction**. The Māturīdī method avoids both by reading the Qur'ān with the tools the Qur'ān itself commands: reflection, context, analogy, language, and transcendence.

The Māturīdī Response

Imām al-Māturīdī did not permit the believer to abandon intellect at the door of scripture. Where a literal meaning would contradict transcendence, reason, or other verses, he invoked one of two Sunni principles:

- **Tafwīḍ** — consigning the "how" and ultimate reality to Allah, while affirming the wording
- **Ta'wīl** — interpreting in a manner consistent with language and transcendence

This was not innovation — it was the method of the early imams who said:

"Pass the verses as they came, without asking how."

The Māturīdī school simply gave structure to that principle, preventing the text from being hijacked by imagination or stripped of meaning by denial.

Conclusion of Chapter 19

Revelation requires reverence — but reverence without knowledge becomes recklessness. Hyper-literalism is not loyalty to the Qur'ān; it is betrayal of its depth, its eloquence, and its own interpretive principles. By rejecting literalism in the sphere of divine attributes, Imām al-Māturīdī protected the Ummah from the oldest temptation in theology: shaping God in the image of creation. His method preserves the majesty of Allah and the dignity of revelation — and for that reason, it remains indispensable.

Chapter 20 — When Literalism Becomes Theologically Dangerous: Qur'ānic Verses That Cannot Be Taken at Face Value

The Qur'ān is divine speech — perfect in truth, perfect in eloquence, and perfect in guidance.
But divine eloquence is layered: some verses are literal, others symbolic; some are decisive, others metaphorical; some describe the unseen through familiar language, while others speak in direct theological proclamation.
To force every verse into a crude literal reading is to flatten the Qur'ān, distort its message, and violate the very principles the Qur'ān gives for its own interpretation.

Islamic theology collapses when verses of the divine attributes (*ṣifāt*) are read with physical imagery. Literalism in these passages leads to absurdity, contradiction, or blasphemy — outcomes the Qur'ān itself rejects.
Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī insisted that the Qur'ān must be read through two complementary lenses:

- **Tanzīh** — Allāh is utterly unlike creation.
- **Balāghah** — the Qur'ān speaks with metaphor, imagery, idiom, and emphasis.

If either lens is abandoned, misguidance begins.

Verses That Become Problematic Under Literalism

Below are several categories of verses which, if read literally, would violate *tawḥīd*, contradict revelation, or imply imperfection.
They must be interpreted with transcendence and linguistic maturity.

1 — Verses That Seem to Imply Allāh Needs Help

"If you help Allāh, He will help you and make your feet firm." (Q 47 : 7)

A literal reading would suggest that the Creator requires assistance or allies — an impossibility, for He is **al-Ghaniyy** (the One free of need).
The true meaning is: if you support His religion and the Prophet ﷺ, He will grant you divine support.
Imām al-Māturīdī explained that this rhetorical form elevates the believer's responsibility without compromising divine independence.

2 — Verses That Seem to Imply Allāh Needs a Loan

"Who is it that will lend Allāh a goodly loan?" (Q 2 : 245)

If taken literally, this would imply poverty on the part of Allāh — *naʿūdhu billāh*.
The Qur'ān itself corrects this misunderstanding:

"…and Allāh is Free of need while you are the poor." (Q 47 : 38)

The verse is a metaphorical encouragement for charity.
The "loan" signifies giving for His sake with the promise of multiplied reward — an honour to human agency, not a need of the Divine.

3 — Verses That Attribute Human Actions to Allāh

"Allāh forgets them…" (Q 9 : 67)
"Allāh mocks them…" (Q 2 : 15)
"Allāh plots…" (Q 3 : 54)

To take these literally would attribute ignorance, deceit, or reaction to Allāh.
The exegetes clarify:

- *"Allāh forgets them"* — He abandons them to their consequences.
- *"Allāh mocks them"* — He returns their mockery upon themselves.
- *"Allāh plots"* — He overturns the schemes of the wicked.

These are **majāz ʿarabī** — rhetorical devices of reversal, common in Arabic, expressing divine justice and irony, not change within God.

4 — Verses of the Attributes That Cannot Be Physical

Expressions such as *Hand*, *Face*, *Coming*, *Rising*, and *Being Above* cannot be taken corporeally.
If understood literally, they would imply direction, space, and limitation — all impossible for the Eternal.

"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him." (Q 42 : 11)

Hence, these expressions are interpreted in ways befitting Allāh:

- **Hand** → power, support, generosity.
- **Face** → the divine essence or countenance.
- **Being above** → sovereignty and dominion.
- **Coming** → the coming of His decree or command.

This is not reinterpretation for convenience, but interpretation for transcendence.

5 — "Indeed, the Hand of Allāh is over their hands." (Q 48 : 10)

This verse describes the believers pledging allegiance (*bayʿah*) to the Prophet ﷺ at Ḥudaybiyyah.
Their physical hands touched his, yet Allāh declares that His "Hand" was above theirs — meaning **His power, support, and covenant** overshadowed their act.
It honours the pledge and affirms that their allegiance to the Messenger was, in reality, allegiance to Allāh.
Imām al-Māturīdī comments that *"the Hand signifies qudrah (power), not jism (limb), for Allāh is beyond organs and directions."*

6 — "And your Lord will come…" (Q 89 : 22)

This is not a literal movement of the Divine, but the manifestation of His **judgment and command** on the Day of Resurrection.
Allāh does not travel; rather His decree becomes evident.
Imām al-Māturīdī affirms that assigning motion to Allāh introduces temporality — a property of creation, not of the Creator.

7 — "Everything will perish except the Face of your Lord." (Q 55 : 26–27)

Here, *"Face"* means the **Essence of Allāh** — He alone is eternal.
All forms and bodies vanish; only the One without beginning or end remains.
This verse powerfully re-asserts transcendence (*tawḥīd al-dhāt*), not corporeality.

The Qur'ān Itself Warns Against Literalism

"As for those in whose hearts is deviation, they follow the ambiguous part seeking discord…" (Q 3 : 7)

The Qur'ān identifies literalist obsession with ambiguous verses as a mark of deviation.
Such readers ignore the clear foundations (*muḥkamāt*) in pursuit of sensational or bodily meanings.
Imām al-Māturīdī's school responded with two protective tools:

- **Tafwīḍ** — affirm the verse and consign its reality to Allāh without delving into "how."
- **Taʾwīl** — interpret figuratively when necessary to guard transcendence.

Both are authentically Sunnī methods; both preserve *tawḥīd*.

The Māturīdī Balance

Imām al-Māturīdī's genius was to unite intellect and reverence.
He rejected both extremes — the denial of the text (*taʿṭīl*) and the bodily affirmation of it (*tashbīh*).
In *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* he writes:

"The Qur'ān addresses people in their language, yet its meanings ascend beyond them.
Whoever confines the Eternal to the speech of the temporal has failed to know Him."

Reason and revelation thus converge: whatever implies need, place, or change must be interpreted metaphorically, for Allāh is **al-Qadīm**, the timeless One.

Conclusion of Chapter 20

Literalism is dangerous not because the Qur'ān is unclear, but because human imagination is undisciplined.
Without sound theological principles, the mind inevitably imagines Allāh in created terms.
Imām al-Māturīdī protected the Ummah by teaching that **tanzīh governs interpretation**:
whenever a literal sense implies limitation or likeness, the meaning must be elevated —
for Allāh is exalted above all imperfection.

"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him." (Q 42 : 11)

This understanding prepares for the next chapter — the doctrine that sits at the very heart of Māturīdī creed:
the affirmation of Allāh's attributes without anthropomorphism.

Chapter 21 — Allah Exists Without Place, Direction, or Location

One of the defining pillars of Māturīdī theology—and Sunni orthodoxy as a whole—is the absolute belief that **Allah exists without being confined to place, direction, space, or location**. Place is a created thing. Direction is a created thing. Space, dimension, distance, form, boundary, movement, and rest are all created things. The Creator of all cannot be dependent on what He created, nor resemble it in any respect.

Allah existed **before the Throne**, before the Pen, before the heavens, before the Kursī, before the universe—and before there was any "above" or "below," any "where," or any "place." When nothing existed but Him, He was exactly as He is now: **Perfect, Eternal, Self-Sufficient, and utterly Unlimited**.

The Qur'ānic Foundation of Transcendence

The doctrine rests on decisive verses:

"There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him." (42:11)

This āyah is conclusive (*muḥkam*). It negates every form of likeness, including:

- bodily likeness
- spatial likeness
- directional likeness
- dimensional likeness

If Allah were in a direction, or sitting on a Throne in a physical sense, or occupying space, then He would necessarily resemble created beings, all

of whom occupy space, direction, and location. This is impossible for the Creator.

Another verse annihilates the literalist imagination:

"Vision cannot grasp Him, but He grasps all vision." (6:103)

Anything that exists in a place can be *encompassed by direction* and *grasped by vision*, at least in principle—even if unseen. But Allah cannot be encompassed. Why? Because **He is not inside creation, not outside in a bodily sense, not above, not below, not contained, not surrounded, and not situated**. He is the Creator of spatial orientation itself.

The verse from Sūrah al-Raḥmān further reinforces this:

"Everyone upon it will perish, and there will remain the Face of your Lord, full of Majesty and Honour." (55:26–27)

Everything that *exists in space and time* perishes. Allah alone remains. The "Face of your Lord" here refers to **His Essence**—eternal, without boundary, without direction, beyond spatial collapse or dimensional decay.

Why Place Is Impossible for Allah

To "exist in a place" has unavoidable implications:

- A body occupies a measurable space
- A body has limits, edges, and form
- A body is subject to direction (above/below, front/behind, left/right)
- A body is either moving or stationary
- A body is either touching, contained, or surrounded

These are all **attributes of created, physical, temporal beings**. If someone claims Allah is "up there in a literal place," or "sitting on the Throne like a king sits," or "located in the sky," then they have (even without intending) assigned to Allah:

- **limit**
- **location**
- **containment**
- **dependency on space**

This is *tajsīm* (corporealism), even if it is wrapped in pious language.

The Māturīdī position is therefore not philosophical symbolism—it is **pure tawḥīd**. A limited god is not God. A spatial god is not God. The Eternal cannot be contained by what is temporary.

What, Then, of the Throne?

The Qurʾān says that Allah **"established [Himself] upon the Throne" (istawā ʿalā al-ʿarsh)**. This statement is true, and it is revealed, and it must be affirmed. But *istiwāʾ* cannot be interpreted in a bodily, sitting, moving, or directional sense.

The Throne (*ʿArsh*) is the greatest of all created things. It is a symbol of divine authority, dominion, and sovereignty—not a seat for a physical deity.

The Māturīdī (and Ashʿarī) explanation is:

- **Istiwā = Allah's dominion, authority, and control over creation**
- **not** sitting, rising, relocating, or "being above" in a physical sense

To take *istiwāʾ* literally as a bodily action requires believing that Allah:

- moves from one place to another

- is affected by time
- is subject to direction
- undergoes physical change

All of this contradicts divine perfection and contradicts the verse of transcendence (42:11).

The Rational Proof

Reason agrees with revelation here:

- Space is created
- Allah is eternal
- Therefore, Allah cannot be inside space
- What is not inside space cannot be restricted by direction
- What is neither in space nor direction cannot be imagined or pictured
- Therefore, Allah must be known by His attributes—not by physical imagery

This rational argument simply protects the meaning of the Qur'ān, not replaces it.

Faith Without Form, Belief Without Imagination

Imām al-Māturīdī did not merely defend this doctrine—he *rescued tawḥīd from imagination*. The mind naturally tries to visualize what it worships. The Māturīdī creed crushes that tendency at its root. To believe in Allah is **not** to picture Him. To affirm His attributes is **not** to imagine them. To recite His verses is **not** to impose a form on Him.

The highest adab of ʿaqīdah is this:

We know that He is, not how He is.

He is closer to us than our jugular vein (50:16), yet nothing contains Him. He is above creation in status, power, and authority—not in direction or distance.

Conclusion of Chapter 21

Allah does not occupy space. Allah does not sit, move, relocate, ascend, descend, float, rest, or exist inside creation or outside it in a physical sense. These are attributes of bodies, and the Lord of the Worlds is infinitely exalted above body, boundary, location, or direction. He is the Creator of space and time, and He remains as He always was—**without place, without direction, without form, without limitation.**

This is not metaphor—this is pure tawḥīd.

Chapter 22 — A Theology for a New Age: Why the Māturīdī Creed Is Crucial in the Modern World

The crisis of our age is not merely political or economic — it is existential. Humanity today wrestles with doubt, nihilism, identity collapse, scientific materialism, militant atheism, conspiracy thinking, hyper-literal religious movements, and the hollowing out of spiritual life. In such a world, theology must do more than defend footnotes in history books — it must *speak to the mind of the age and heal the soul of the age*. This is precisely why Imām al-Māturīdī's creed is not a relic of medieval scholarship, but a *living remedy* for the modern world.

The Māturīdī school cultivates a believer who thinks without arrogance, submits without blindness, and worships without imagining. It trains the mind to recognise Allah through evidence, the heart to worship Him with certainty, and the intellect to defend faith without fear. This balance is rare — and it is exactly what our time demands.

1. A Creed That Engages Reason — Answering Modern Atheism

The modern atheist does not worship idols of stone — he worships the idol of scientism, randomness, and the self. He claims that belief in God is irrational, unscientific, or sentimental. But the Māturīdī creed responds with a simple, devastating truth:

Reason itself points to the necessity of a Creator.

Imām al-Māturīdī teaches that:

- order implies an Organizer
- design implies a Designer

- law implies a Lawgiver
- morality implies a Moral Source
- contingency implies a Necessary Being

This rational entry point is *exactly* what Muslim youth need when confronted with university atheism or secular pressure. Where literalist theology says, *"Don't ask,"* the Māturīdī tradition says, *"Think, and Allah will guide your thoughts."*

2. A Creed That Protects Transcendence — Guarding Against Literalism and Extremism

Modern literalist movements reduce faith to surface slogans and physical imagery. Their "theology" produces rigidity, intolerance, and intellectual shallowness. In the worst cases, it produces extremism.

The Māturīdī method protects believers from:

- imagining Allah as a body in the sky
- interpreting scripture with childish literalism
- turning religion into emotional slogans without substance
- mistaking rigidity for piety

Transcendence (*tanzīh*) is a shield — it prevents the sacred from being dragged into the realm of physical imagination or fundamentalist simplification.

3. A Creed Rooted in Revelation — Resisting Secular Spirituality

While atheism attacks religion from the outside, **modern spirituality** corrupts it from within — preaching "energy," "the universe," and

"morality without God." The Māturīdī creed responds by grounding faith in:

- revelation, not intuition
- prophethood, not speculation
- certainty (*yaqīn*), not relativism
- transcendence, not pantheism

Modern man is drowning in "spiritual feelings" with no map. Māturīdī theology gives the map.

4. A Creed That Respects the Intellect — Healing the Muslim Mind

For the last 150 years, colonisation, decline, and intellectual stagnation have produced two unhealthy reactions in parts of the Muslim world:

- **Anti-intellectual fatalism** — "Just follow, don't think."
- **Rebellious rationalism** — "Throw away tradition."

The Māturīdī tradition breaks both extremes by declaring:

- intellect is a *gift*, not an enemy
- revelation is a *light*, not a cage
- reason and revelation *cooperate* — neither cancels the other

This restores balance, dignity, and confidence to Muslim thought.

5. A Creed Built for a Civilisation, Not a Sect

Historically:

- The Ottomans (600+ years)
- The Seljuks

- The Central Asian Hanafi world
- The Mughals and Indian Subcontinent scholars
- The Balkans, Caucasus, and much of the Arab heartland

— all built their theological, legal, political, and educational institutions on Māturīdī-Ashʿarī creed.

This is not an accident.

The Māturīdī mindset **builds societies**, not sects.
It produces **jurists, thinkers, judges, saints, teachers, and statesmen**, not narrow-minded partisans.

If the Ummah is to regain civilisational strength, it must rediscover the civilisational creed that sustained it.

6. A Creed That Can Withstand the Future

Artificial intelligence, biotechnology, transhumanism, quantum physics, post-modern ethics — the 21st century will break any theology that is shallow, rigid, or literalist. Only a theology that welcomes reflection, affirms reason, and is not threatened by science or inquiry can survive the intellectual storms ahead.

Imām al-Māturīdī gave the Ummah exactly that.

His creed is not merely defensive.
It is **confident, expansive, and resilient**.

It does not fear questions.
It *cultivates* the ability to answer them.

Conclusion of Chapter 22

The Māturīdī creed is not "for the past." It is for:

- the struggling believer
- the questioning student
- the modern thinker
- the post-modern world
- the future of Islam

It is a way of believing that *thinks*, a way of thinking that *worships*, and a way of worshipping that *knows*. In an age of confusion, the Māturīdī school offers clarity. In an age of extremism, it offers balance. In an age of doubt, it offers certainty.

It is not merely theology.
It is **intellectual raḥmah (mercy)** for the modern Muslim mind.

Chapter 23 — Answering Atheism and Secular Doubt: A Māturīdī Response

The modern world has produced a category of skepticism unknown in earlier times — not the idol-worship of jāhiliyyah, nor the dualism of ancient Persia, but a worldview that denies the very existence of the Creator. This worldview, often wrapped in the language of "rationality" and "science," claims that belief in God is outdated, unscientific, or emotionally driven. It is a worldview that has shaken young Muslims across universities, online platforms, and intellectual spaces. To answer it, we do not need emotional slogans, rhetorical threats, or blind dogma. We need clarity, confidence, and *proof*.

This is where the Māturīdī tradition shines. Unlike literalist expressions of theology that avoid rational argument, the Māturīdī school embraces the intellect as a *vehicle toward faith*, not an enemy of faith. Imām al-Māturīdī understood that the Qur'ān repeatedly commands human beings to **reflect**, **reason**, **contemplate**, and **observe**. Therefore, refuting atheism is not a *departure* from Islam — it is obedience to the Qur'ān itself.

1. Recognizing Allah Through Reason: Design, Order, and Necessity

The universe is intelligible. It operates by laws, patterns, precision, and fine-tuned harmony — from galaxies to genetic code. Nothing about existence suggests randomness. The Māturīdī argument begins with what the Qur'ān asks us to observe:

"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, are signs for people of understanding." (3:190)

The Qur'ān appeals to *observable order* as evidence for God. The logic is simple:

- Order requires an Organizer
- Law requires a Lawgiver
- Design requires a Designer
- Contingency requires a Necessary Being

This is the rational intuition Allah placed within every sound intellect.

The Māturīdī theologian then asks: *Which makes more sense* — that intelligence comes from intelligence, or that intelligence emerged from lifeless matter by accident? The Qur'ān answers:

"Were they created from nothing? Or are they themselves the creators?" (52:35)

This verse alone is a direct refutation of atheism. Something cannot come from nothing. A contingent universe cannot be self-created. The Māturīdī system exposes atheism not by attacking science, but by demonstrating that **science itself points to a rational Creator**.

2. Morality as Evidence for the Divine

Atheism can describe human behaviour, but it cannot justify morality. It cannot answer:

- Why is injustice objectively wrong?
- Why is murder evil?
- Why is truthfulness better than lying?

- Why *ought* we to do anything?

Without a transcendent source of value, morality becomes *personal preference* or *social habit*. It loses objectivity. The Māturīdī school affirms that the human mind can recognize basic moral truths, but those truths ultimately point back to a **Lawgiver whose nature is Wise and Just**.

Allah says:

"Indeed, Allah commands justice and excellence." (16:90)

Moral objectivity is not possible in a purely material universe. It requires God.

3. Meaning, Purpose, and the Human Soul

No creature on earth searches for meaning except the human being. We ask:

- Why am I here?
- What is my purpose?
- What happens after death?

Atheism has no answer beyond: *"You are an accident."*

But the Qur'ān answers with clarity:

"Did you think We created you without purpose?" (23:115)

The Māturīdī framework shows that a purposeless universe cannot produce purposeful creatures. Our hunger for meaning is a sign that meaning exists. Just as thirst proves the existence of water, the soul's longing proves the existence of its Source.

4. The Limits of Science and the Illusion of Scientism

Science describes *how* things happen. It cannot answer *why* anything exists at all. It cannot speak about:

- the soul
- the afterlife
- metaphysics
- moral obligation
- ultimate purpose

Scientism — the belief that science alone explains everything — is a philosophical claim, *not a scientific one*. Māturīdī theology exposes this confusion. Islam honours science, but refuses to turn it into a god.

The Qur'ān repeatedly invites observation and discovery, but it never allows observation to replace the Observer.

5. Revelation Completes What Reason Begins

Reason can prove that Allah exists, but it cannot tell us:

- His names
- His attributes
- His laws
- His will
- The path to salvation

This is why prophethood is necessary. The Māturīdī school therefore joins reason with revelation:

- **Reason** establishes the *existence* of God

- **Revelation** defines the *knowledge* of God

Both are needed. Neither is sufficient alone.

Conclusion of Chapter 23

Atheism collapses under its own weight — it cannot account for existence, order, morality, purpose, consciousness, or destiny. The Māturīdī creed offers a worldview that satisfies both the mind and the soul. It is intellectually confident, spiritually complete, and rooted in the Qur'ānic invitation to reflect:

"Will they not use their intellect?" (2:44)

Thus, the response to atheism is not fear, but clarity. Not silence, but evidence. Not suppression of thought, but guidance of thought.

Chapter 24 — Protecting the Ummah from Extremism and Literalism

Extremism does not emerge from faith — it emerges from distortion. When theology is stripped of balance, depth, context, and intellect, it becomes a weapon in the hands of the unqualified. One of the greatest strengths of the Māturīdī tradition is that it blocks the roots of extremism *before* they grow into destructive branches. By teaching believers **how to think**, not merely **what to recite**, the Māturīdī creed preserves the Ummah from religious fanaticism, sectarian rigidity, and ideological manipulation.

Extremism in Islam historically came from *two theological diseases*:

1. **Hyper-literalism** — interpreting scripture without intellect, principles, or context
2. **Emotional zeal without knowledge** — heat in the heart, but darkness in the mind

Both diseases feed each other. Literalism supplies the *misinterpretation*, and zeal supplies the *violence*. The Māturīdī tradition cures both.

1. How Literalism Breeds Extremism

Literalism may begin as a claim of "taking the Qur'ān at face value," but it ends with:

- *verses violently misapplied*
- *punishments taken out of context*
- *theology expressed in physical, crude imagery*

- *Muslims condemned as disbelievers over minor disagreements*
- *the religion reduced to slogans and anatomy*

When a person reads verses without method, they become capable of:

- calling other Muslims "kāfir"
- imposing rulings without legal framework
- imagining Allah in bodily form
- interpreting every command as absolute, without context or conditions

This is precisely how Khawārij-like thinking reappears in every century. The thought process is always the same:

Text without principles → interpretation without restraint → religion without mercy.

Imām al-Māturīdī prevented this collapse by insisting that the Qur'ān must be read:

- **with transcendent theology**
- **with rational discipline**
- **with linguistic awareness**
- **with legal methodology**
- **with the principles of the scholars, not the impulses of the nafs**

2. How Māturīdī Theology Blocks Takfīr Culture

Extremist movements survive by *kufr-labeling* — declaring Muslims outside the fold over disagreements or mistakes. This is the foundation of sectarian violence and spiritual terrorism. But the Māturīdī tradition stands on a prophetic principle:

“Whoever prays toward our qiblah and eats our slaughter is a Muslim.”

And on the legal principle:

“We do not declare a Muslim a disbeliever due to interpretation, even if mistaken.”

Thus, the Māturīdī school built *intellectual fences* against takfīr by teaching:

- **not every error is disbelief**
- **not every bidʿah is kufr**
- **not every sinner is outside Islam**

This protects the Ummah’s unity and prevents bloodshed, social fragmentation, and the spiritual despair that comes from reckless excommunication.

3. A Theology That Produces Mercy, Not Harshness

When belief in Allah is grounded in transcendence, balance, and reflection, the heart becomes *humble*, not arrogant; *merciful*, not violent. Extremism flourishes where religion becomes:

- shallow instead of deep
- literal instead of principled
- emotional instead of thoughtful
- angry instead of compassionate

The Qur’ān describes the Ummah of Muhammad ﷺ as:

“a middle nation” (2:143)

Māturīdī theology operationalizes this verse: it *builds moderation into creed itself*, so that extremism never finds a doorway into the believer's mind.

4. A Faith That Can Coexist Without Compromise

Some mistake balance for weakness. But balance is strength. The Māturīdī creed creates believers who can:

- live confidently in diverse societies
- uphold Islam without hostility or inferiority
- interact with knowledge and reason, not fear
- defend their faith without adopting aggression

Such a believer does not feel threatened by questions, nor tempted by reactionary rage. He is rooted — and a rooted tree does not sway in every wind.

Conclusion of Chapter 24

Extremism is defeated not only on the battlefield, but in the *classroom, the masjid, and the heart*. When theology is sound, minds remain stable. When creed is balanced, hearts remain merciful. When reason and revelation walk together, the Ummah remains protected.

The Māturīdī tradition, by design, closes the doors that extremists walk through. It preserves the dignity of the Qur'ān, the mercy of Islam, and the unity of Muslims — not by compromise, but by *clarity, depth, and transcendence*.

Chapter 25 — Restoring Intellectual and Spiritual Confidence in the Ummah

A crisis of confidence has settled over parts of the modern Muslim world — not confidence in Allah, nor in the Prophet ﷺ, but *confidence in understanding, articulating, and defending the dīn*. Many Muslims today feel intellectually intimidated by secular narratives, spiritually suffocated by literalist rhetoric, or emotionally fatigued by constant division. The result is a generation that often *believes*, but does not always *understand* — a generation that *loves Islam*, but at times struggles to *explain Islam*, even to itself.

Imām al-Māturīdī's theology revives confidence. It gives the believer a creed that is intellectually grounded, spiritually elevating, and emotionally stabilizing. It shows that Islam is not afraid of questions, not threatened by science, and not shaken by doubt. It teaches that faith is not the enemy of the intellect — faith is the completion of the intellect.

Where doubt weakens the heart, Māturīdī theology strengthens it. Where confusion clouds the mind, it clarifies. Where extremism hardens the soul, it softens. Where literalism suffocates the intellect, it liberates while keeping the reins of revelation firmly in hand.

1. Replacing Doubt with Clarity

Modern Muslims face complex questions:

- *"How do I reconcile faith with science?"*
- *"Why does evil exist?"*
- *"Does Islam allow reasoning?"*

- *"How do I understand the unseen?"*

The Māturīdī tradition does not run from these questions. It embraces them, organizes them, and answers them with Qur'ānic logic and rational proof. This transforms doubt from a *threat* into an *opportunity for growth*.

The believer is no longer defensive or afraid — he becomes confident, because his faith is not built on memorized slogans, but on understanding.

2. Replacing Rigidity with Balance

Rigidity is the reflex of the insecure. When a person fears doubt, he clings to literalism. When he fears complexity, he bans intellect. When he fears difference, he makes takfīr. But balanced creed removes fear.

The Māturīdī approach teaches:

- certainty without aggression
- reverence without naivety
- structure without suffocation
- intellect without arrogance
- submission without blindness

This produces a believer who is **firm in belief but gentle in character** — the prophetic ideal.

3. Replacing Passivity with Intellectual Agency

For too long, parts of the Ummah have been taught *what* to think, but not *how* to think. This produces stagnation. The Māturīdī heritage

restores *intellectual agency* — the believer becomes a thinker, not merely a receiver.

He is taught *principles*, not just *conclusions*. He can:

- evaluate arguments
- see through ideological manipulation
- recognize false analogy
- expose weak theology
- identify misinterpretation

This empowers Muslims in classrooms, debates, research, and public discourse. With this, the Ummah regains its role as a civilization of thought — not merely a community of reaction.

4. Replacing Inferiority with Civilizational Memory

One of the greatest wounds in the modern Muslim psyche is the loss of memory — many do not realize that for **one thousand years**, the Muslim world produced:

- the highest theology
- the finest jurisprudence
- the earliest scientific method
- the greatest hospitals and universities
- the most refined philosophy and ethics

And behind that flourishing was a theological worldview that **valued the intellect** and **honoured revelation**.

To revive Māturīdī theology is to remind Muslims that our dīn built civilizations — and can do so again.

Conclusion of Chapter 25

At its core, Māturīdī theology is not merely about *defeating deviants* or *winning debates*. It is about *forming confident believers* — men and women who stand before Allah with certainty, before creation with clarity, before the Qur'ān with reverence, and before the world with courage.

Confidence returns when faith is understood. Peace returns when faith is balanced. Strength returns when faith is rooted.

With this, we transition from defending theology to reviving legacy. The next chapters turn to the heart of your project: **why the work of Imām al-Māturīdī must be revived through his Tafsīr, and why this translation matters for the Ummah today.**

Chapter 26 — A Hidden Gem of Islamic Civilization: The Greatness of Tafsīr al-Māturīdī

Among the vast oceans of Islamic scholarship, certain works stand as mountains—immovable, timeless, and foundational. *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*, commonly known as **Tafsīr al-Māturīdī**, is one such mountain. Yet, despite its magnitude, it remains one of the *least known* masterpieces of Sunni theology in the modern world. This paradox—*a colossal work, globally obscure*—is one of the great intellectual tragedies of our age.

For over a thousand years, *Tafsīr al-Māturīdī* shaped the belief of empires, jurists, theologians, and seminaries from Samarqand to Istanbul, Bukhārā to Delhi. It is the earliest surviving Hanafi-Sunni tafsīr and one of the first works in Islamic history to **systematically integrate tafsīr, kalām, and rational theology into a unified Qur'ānic vision**. It did what few have ever achieved: it showed how **revelation and reason walk side by side**.

Yet today, outside specialist circles, the work is scarcely read—and almost unknown to English-speaking Muslims. Its pages are treasured in academic libraries, Ottoman manuscripts, and dusty madrasa shelves, but its *voice is muted* in the modern discourse.

This silence is what my project seeks to shatter.

1. What Makes This Tafsīr Unique?

Tafsīr al-Māturīdī is not a simple commentary that recounts narrations or linguistic notes. It is:

- **a theological shield** — protecting tawḥīd from literalism, anthropomorphism, and rational excess

- **a philosophical answer** — dismantling the claims of deviated sects, philosophers, and theologians
- **a spiritual guide** — connecting the heart to Allah through reflection and certainty
- **a legal compass** — harmonizing creed with the Hanafi juristic worldview

Imām al-Māturīdī reads the Qur'ān with:

- the mind of a theologian,
- the discipline of a jurist,
- the structure of a logician,
- and the humility of a saint.

For him, **every āyah is a doorway to tawḥīd**. Even verses on law, history, or parables become frameworks for theology. In his hands, tafsīr becomes *architecture*, not commentary.

2. A Tafsīr that Answers the Age of Doubt

Modern Muslims face intellectual turbulence: atheism, scientism, materialism, and confusion about divine attributes. What they need is not shallow responses, but a *systematic method* that restores confidence.

Tafsīr al-Māturīdī provides that method.

It shows:

- that the Qur'ān *expects* the believer to think
- that faith is strengthened, not threatened, by reflection
- that divine transcendence is non-negotiable
- that reason and revelation are allies, not enemies

This tafsīr gives modern Muslims a language through which they can *believe intelligently and worship knowingly*.

3. A Lost Voice of the Sunni Intellectual Tradition

In Islamic history, this tafsīr was not marginal—it was *central*. Ottoman theological training was built upon the Māturīdī framework. The Hanafi world treated his exegesis as a theological spine. But due to:

- colonial disruption,
- the fall of traditional empires,
- the loss of classical curricula, and
- the rise of shallow literalist discourse,

this tafsīr became hidden from the public eye. Its neglect was not due to lack of brilliance—it was due to lack of access.

To revive this tafsīr is to **revive an entire Sunni intellectual heritage**.

4. Why Its Revival Matters Now

The absence of this tafsīr in our era has left a vacuum. In that vacuum, two extremes have spread:

- **irrational literalism** (that imagines God in physical terms)
- **soulless rationalism** (that empties God of His attributes altogether)

Imām al-Māturīdī is the antidote to both.

His tafsīr teaches:

- transcendence without negation,
- reason without rebellion,

- submission without blind imitation.

This is precisely the balance needed for a generation drowning in confusion yet hungry for truth.

Conclusion of Chapter 26

Tafsīr al-Māturīdī is a hidden gem—not because its content is obscure, but because its access has been limited. It is one of the greatest works of Sunni theology ever authored, yet English-speaking Muslims have been strangers to it. Its revival is more than a scholarly task—it is an *act of civilizational restoration*.

To translate it is to reopen a window that has been closed for centuries, allowing its light once more to illuminate the minds and hearts of the Ummah.

Chapter 27 — Why I Chose to Translate It: Reviving a Neglected Legacy

My decision to translate *Tafsīr al-Māturīdī* was not a matter of academic curiosity. It was born out of necessity — a necessity I felt as a Muslim, as a student of theology, and as a witness to the rising storms of confusion affecting the modern Ummah. The more I surveyed the contemporary landscape of Islamic discourse, the more urgent one reality became: **our greatest theological treasures remain locked behind language, and our youth are battling modern doubts without access to the very intellectual tools that once safeguarded entire civilizations.**

Across centuries, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah* served as one of the most important Sunni commentaries on the Qur'ān. Yet, in the English-speaking world, its voice has almost vanished. We have plenty of literal translations of verses and compilations of narrations, but we lack **the deep, philosophical, rational, and theological engagement with the Qur'ān** that Imām al-Māturīdī embodied. The result is a dangerous imbalance: Muslims either fall into simplistic literalism that cannot withstand modern scrutiny, or into ungrounded speculation that drifts from revelation. Between these two extremes stands al-Māturīdī — offering the balance we lost.

I chose to translate this work because I saw a gap widening before my eyes:

- **Young Muslims encountering atheism with no intellectual shield.**
- **Seekers of knowledge exposed only to literalist readings of theology.**
- **Students of the Qur'ān taught "what" to believe, but not "why."**

- **Believers confused by anthropomorphic interpretations of divine attributes.**
- **Educated minds longing for a faith that speaks to reason as well as heart.**

I became convinced of a painful truth: *we are suffering from an amputation of our own heritage*. Our intellectual tradition is vast, rich, and deeply rational — yet the English-speaking Ummah sees only fragments of it. How many Muslims today know that our scholars built entire metaphysical systems to defend tawḥīd against philosophers, dualists, anthropomorphists, and materialists? How many know that Islam produced Imāms like al-Māturīdī, who demonstrated that reason, far from threatening faith, is one of the greatest proofs of God?

This translation is my small effort to reconnect the Ummah with that legacy.

It is not enough to reaffirm theology — we must **understand it, defend it, and internalize it**. Imām al-Māturīdī gives us the tools to do that. His writing liberates the believer from blind reaction and instead cultivates *certainty through reflection*. His tafsīr does not run from questions — it anticipates them and answers them with dignity. It does not silence the intellect — it disciplines it. It does not reduce God to physical imagery — it elevates tawḥīd to its proper majesty.

I chose to translate him because he gives the modern Muslim exactly what is missing: **a creed that can breathe in the modern world without compromising revelation, and a theology that satisfies both the mind and the soul.**

For centuries, the Muslim world preserved and taught this tafsīr — but today, English is the dominant global language. If our greatest theological masterpiece remains unavailable in that tongue, then we risk

allowing an entire generation to inherit only *a partial Islam — an Islam of slogans, not structure; emotion, not insight*.

My intention, therefore, is simple:

- **to revive a voice that defended orthodoxy for a millennium,**
- **to return balance to our understanding of creed,**
- **and to give future Muslims access to the foundations we should never have lost.**

This translation is not merely a scholarly project — it is an act of service, an attempt to bridge centuries of silence, and a contribution toward restoring the intellectual confidence of the Ummah.

Chapter 28 — Reclaiming an Intellectual Heritage

Every civilization stands on the strength of its memory. When continuity is preserved, identity remains strong, thought remains disciplined, and faith remains deep. But when memory is severed — when books are lost, languages forgotten, and intellectual chains broken — the community begins to weaken, not through defeat by an enemy, but through erosion from within. This is precisely what has happened to large parts of the Muslim world in the modern age. Our greatest heritage, especially in theology, has been fragmented, compartmentalised, or abandoned — not by malice, but by neglect.

For centuries, the Muslim world produced scholars whose intellectual confidence was matched only by their spiritual humility. They debated philosophers on substance and accident, confronted dualists and materialists, refuted anthropomorphists, and responded to skeptics with arguments that dazzled even their opponents. They built seminaries, libraries, academies, and entire cosmologies rooted in tawḥīd. They produced a civilization in which theology (*ʿaqīdah*) was not merely memorized — it was *understood, defended, and lived.*

At the heart of that intellectual tradition stood works like *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*, which harmonised text and reason with breathtaking precision. Yet today, many Muslims know the slogans of tawḥīd but not its philosophy; they inherit creed, but not its proofs; they recite verses, but are not shown how to interpret them beyond literal surfaces. The chain of transmission has not disappeared — but it has thinned. What once was a mighty river is now, in some regions, reduced to a trickle.

To reclaim our intellectual heritage is not nostalgia — it is *survival*. A community that forgets how it used to think will eventually forget how to believe with depth. Our rivals today are not the same Muʿtazilī polemicists or Greek logicians that confronted al-Māturīdī. They are materialism, nihilism, atheism, hyper-literalist misreadings, pseudo-spiritual escapism, secular doubt, and identity confusion. These modern crises demand theological clarity, not slogans; rooted thinking, not reactionary emotion.

This is where reintroducing Imām al-Māturīdī matters most. His method teaches us that Islam is not afraid of ideas — Islam produces ideas. We are not a civilisation of defensiveness, but of confidence. Our creed is not brittle; it is unbreakable. Our theology is not simplistic; it is sophisticated. Translating and reviving Māturīdī thought is therefore not a luxury — it is an act of repair. We are stitching back together the fabric of Sunni intellectual history, thread by thread, so that future generations can inherit a fortress, not a ruin.

By reclaiming this heritage, we restore three things that the modern Muslim desperately needs:

- **Intellectual continuity** — so we know who we are and where we come from.
- **Theological confidence** — so we can stand firm in a world of doubt and noise.
- **Spiritual dignity** — so belief is not blind, but illuminated by understanding.

Our civilization once led the world because it knew how to think with reverence and debate with discipline. Reviving Māturīdī theology is a step toward restoring that balance. We are not building something new — we are reopening a door that should never have closed.

Chapter 29 — The Translator's Reflection

Translating *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah* has been one of the most humbling intellectual and spiritual journeys of my life. It is impossible to walk through the pages of Imām al-Māturīdī and emerge unchanged. His thought does not merely inform the mind — it refines it, disciplines it, and forces it to submit to a higher order of clarity. His words do not simply explain verses — they reveal dimensions of the Qur'ān that one may have recited for decades, yet never truly *seen*.

There were days I would pause after a single paragraph, needing time to absorb the weight of what he wrote. I found myself repeatedly struck by three qualities that permeate his tafsīr:

1. **His intellectual honesty** — he does not force meanings into the text, nor evade difficult verses.
2. **His spiritual humility** — he never allows reason to overshadow revelation, nor revelation to silence reason.
3. **His unwavering commitment to tawḥīd** — every discussion, every interpretation, every argument ultimately protects the majesty and transcendence of Allāh.

Unlike many polemicists of our age, Imām al-Māturīdī debates without ego. He dismantles arguments without humiliating opponents. He corrects deviation without cruelty. His purpose was never to "win," but to guide. Translating his work taught me that *truth does not need aggression — it needs clarity*. And clarity was his weapon.

I also became deeply aware of how impoverished our modern discourse has become. Today, many Muslims are taught creed as lists to memorize, not realities to understand. We teach conclusions, but not reasoning. We produce loyalty, but not certainty. And so when doubts,

ideologies, and modern philosophies come, many hearts crumble — not because truth is weak, but because the foundations were shallow.

This is why translating him felt urgent. The Ummah does not need more noise. It needs *roots*. It needs a theology that can face the microscope of the modern mind while still elevating the soul toward Allah. It needs a creed that **thinks, breathes, and inspires** — not one that merely instructs and intimidates.

There were moments in the translation process when I felt I was not working *on* the text, but the text was working *on me*. My own understanding of tawḥīd deepened. My appreciation for the Qur'ān expanded. My sense of reverence increased. And above all, my conviction grew that the revival of this tradition is not an academic project — it is an act of service to the dīn itself.

To hold in one's hands the legacy of a scholar who safeguarded the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah for a millennium is to feel the weight of an *amānah* (sacred trust). My hope — and my prayer — is that this work becomes a bridge between generations: from Samarqand to today, from the ink of our ancestors to the screens and shelves of our children.

If even one young Muslim, struggling with doubt, finds clarity through Imām al-Māturīdī… If even one teacher finds a framework for balance… If even one community is protected from extremism… then every hour of translation, every moment of research, and every difficulty along the way will have been worth it.

This work truly belongs to the Ummah. And the light within it belongs to Allāh, who grants understanding to whom He wills. I ask Him to accept it, forgive its shortcomings, and allow it to be a sadaqah jāriyah for me and for all who preserve and teach true creed.

Chapter 30 — Conclusion: A Legacy Reawakened

Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī was not simply a theologian of his age — he was a theologian *for all ages*. His voice rose in a world struggling to balance revelation and reason, and his message continues to address the very same struggle today. The tools he provided, the principles he articulated, and the creed he defended form one of the most sophisticated and spiritually nourishing theological heritages in Islamic civilization. Yet, for too long, his legacy has remained hidden behind language barriers, academic walls, and historical neglect.

This book has aimed to reawaken that legacy — not by glorifying a personality, but by reviving a *method*, a way of thinking, a framework of harmony between the Qur'ān and the intellect. Imām al-Māturīdī showed that:

- Islam does not fear reason — it commands it.
- Tawḥīd is not threatened by inquiry — it is strengthened through understanding.
- The Qur'ān is not a text of literal surfaces — it is a revelation of layered guidance, depth, majesty, and transcendence.
- True creed does not shrink the Divine into spatial forms — it elevates the mind to transcend such limitations.
- Faith is not irrational — it is the highest form of reason illuminated by revelation.

The Muslim world today faces intellectual and spiritual storms: atheism, secularism, materialism, hyper-literalism, extremism, identity confusion, and a general loss of confidence. Arguments that once misled only elites

are now spread through algorithms, social media, and globalized doubt. This age requires more than memorized formulas — it requires *grounded conviction*. The modern believer must know not only *what* we believe, but *why* we believe it, and *how* to defend it with clarity and compassion.

This is where the Māturīdī tradition re-enters history with renewed relevance. It offers a theology that:

- speaks to the mind without starving the heart,
- guards transcendence without denying meaning,
- protects reason without diminishing revelation,
- and upholds balance where others fall into extremes.

It is no coincidence that for nearly a thousand years, the vast majority of the Ḥanafī world — from the Ottoman Empire to the scholars of Central Asia, the courts of India, the seminaries of Bukhārā, and the academies of Istanbul — adopted this creed. It brought stability where chaos threatened, structure where confusion spread, and dignity where the dīn was challenged.

Today, by reviving the thought of Imām al-Māturīdī and making his tafsīr accessible in English, we are rebuilding a bridge that never should have been broken. We are reconnecting a generation to one of the strongest intellectual backbones of Ahl al-Sunnah. We are declaring, once again, that Sunni theology is not reactionary — it is foundational. It is not fragile — it is unshakeable. It is not shallow — it is oceanic.

This legacy now returns to the Ummah, not as a museum artifact, but as a *living inheritance*. The task ahead is not only to read it, but to teach it, embody it, and transmit it — with wisdom, with patience, and with sincerity. For theology is not merely studied in books; it is lived in character, in worship, in humility, and in the way we carry Allah's dīn in a world desperately in need of balance.

May Allah make this work a means of revival, understanding, protection, and guidance. May He reward Imām al-Māturīdī for defending His religion, and may He forgive our shortcomings as we attempt to continue that work in our own time. May He allow this effort to serve as a light for future generations, and a sadaqah jāriyah for all who teach, preserve, and uphold the noble creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamāʿah.

The story does not end here — it begins here again.

Translator's Note

Translating the words of Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī is not a task of language alone — it is a task of *amānah*, a trust. His writings stand at the intersection of revelation and reason, spirit and intellect, creed and contemplation. They carry a precision that guards the mind, a humility that protects the heart, and a light that has guided generations of scholars across centuries. To bring his voice into the English language is, therefore, an effort that requires not only accuracy, but reverence.

For too long, the English-speaking Ummah has been deprived of access to this theological giant whose thought shaped entire civilizations — the scholars of Transoxiana, the lands of the Seljūqs, the courts of the Ottomans, and the academies of Central Asia and the Indian Subcontinent. His tafsīr, ***Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*,** is among the earliest and most profound intellectual commentaries on the Qur'ān, yet it has remained largely inaccessible to those who do not read Arabic or Turkish. My goal in this translation is to bridge that gap — to carry his legacy from Samarqand into the present age.

In preparing this work, I followed three guiding principles:

1. **Fidelity to Meaning** — preserving the Imām's ideas with exactness, without distortion or dilution.
2. **Clarity of Expression** — rendering complex theological concepts into accessible English while retaining their depth.
3. **Preservation of Spirit** — ensuring that the humility, balance, and reverence of Māturīdī thought are felt, not merely read.

This translation is not a reinterpretation, nor a modernisation of the Imām's theology. It is an attempt to *transmit*, not transform — to make accessible what already stands complete, luminous, and authoritative in its original form.

I have also maintained a commitment to the theological identity of Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamāʿah, recognising that the Māturīdī school — alongside its Ashʿarī counterpart — represents the historic spine of Sunni orthodoxy. Where necessary, explanatory notes are provided for the modern reader, but always with restraint, so that the Imām's voice remains the dominant voice in the text.

I ask Allāh to accept this work as an offering in service of His Book and His dīn — a means of reviving sound creed, strengthening conviction, and protecting future generations from confusion, extremism, and doubt. Any clarity in this effort is from Allāh alone, and every shortcoming is my own.

وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

About the Author

Dr. Yusof Mutahar is an Australian medical doctor, author and theologian. He completed his medical training at the University of Western Australia and later specialised in his field, earning recognition for his contributions to public health, medical education, and humanitarian service. Alongside his professional achievements, he has devoted himself to the study of Islamic theology, fiqh, tafsīr, and the spiritual sciences of the heart.

His journey in Islamic knowledge eventually led him to *taṣawwuf*, where he found the depth, balance, and spiritual refinement that complemented his study of creed. The Naqshbandi path is renowned for its sobriety, discipline, remembrance (dhikr), and emphasis on sincerity, humility, and purification of the heart. It teaches the seeker to travel inwardly toward Allāh while outwardly remaining engaged in society—embodying the prophetic balance between **Sharīʿah, ʿAqīdah, and Iḥsān**. This approach resonated deeply with Dr. Yusof, who found that spiritual refinement must walk hand-in-hand with sound creed and righteous action. For him, taṣawwuf is not an escape from the world, but a transformation *within* the world—where the heart is polished, the ego is softened, and worship becomes presence rather than performance.

In addition to his medical career, Dr. Yusof has dedicated himself to reviving the intellectual and spiritual heritage of Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamāʿah. His work aims to protect the Ummah from theological imbalance—whether from cold literalism on one side or unanchored speculation on the other. His translation of *Tafsīr al-Māturīdī (Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah)* and his writings on creed serve one mission: **to restore a faith that thinks clearly, lives humbly, and remembers Allāh deeply**.

He believes that Islam must be understood with the mind, lived with the limbs, and tasted with the heart—just as the scholars and awliyā' of the

past embodied. His ongoing prayer is that Allāh grants him sincerity, benefits others through his efforts, and allows knowledge to be a means of purification, not pride.

Glossary

ʿAqīdah (العقيدة)
Islamic creed; the foundational beliefs that every Muslim must hold regarding Allāh, His attributes, the Prophets, the unseen, and matters of the Hereafter. In Sunni Islam, ʿaqīdah is derived from the Qur'ān, Sunnah, and the interpretations of the orthodox scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamāʿah.

Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamāʿah (أهل السنة والجماعة)
The mainstream orthodox community of Islam, following the Qur'ān, authentic Sunnah, and the united understanding of the early Muslim community. Theologically, this includes the Ashʿarī and Māturīdī schools, and in fiqh, the four Sunni madhāhib.

Ashʿarī (الأشعري)
Relating to the theological school founded by Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324 AH). Ashʿarīs emphasize the primacy of revelation and employ reason with caution. Together with the Māturīdīs, they represent Sunni orthodoxy. Their differences with Māturīdīs are minor in doctrine and major mainly in method.

Atharī / Ḥanbalī-Literalist
A theological orientation that avoids interpretation of Qurʾānic verses about Allāh's attributes, insisting on apparent meanings without figurative reading. Historically linked to the early Ḥanbalī tradition, though modern "Salafī" literalism goes further into anthropomorphic danger than classical Ḥanbalism intended.

Bidʿah (بدعة)
Innovation in religion — introducing beliefs or practices into Islam that have no basis in the Qur'ān, Sunnah, or the consensus of scholars. The term is often misused by extremists; classical scholars recognised

categories and distinguished harmful innovations from beneficial worldly developments.

Dajjāl (الدجال)
The Antichrist figure in Islamic eschatology, who will appear near the end of time as a great deceiver and trial for humanity. Mentioned in authentic hadith. His reality is part of Sunni creed, though not central in kalām discussions.

Dalīl (دليل)
Evidence or proof. In ʿaqīdah, it refers to scriptural (naqlī) or rational (ʿaqlī) proof used to establish doctrines.

Dhikr (ذكر)
Remembrance of Allāh through recitation, contemplation, and presence of heart. In tasawwuf, dhikr is both vocal and silent, purifying the heart of heedlessness and polishing the inner mirror of the soul.

Dunyā (الدنيا)
The temporal world of material existence — a place of trial, action, and responsibility. Often contrasted with the ākhirah (afterlife). Tasawwuf warns against attachment to the dunyā, not its lawful enjoyment.

Falsafah (فلسفة)
Islamic philosophy influenced by Greek metaphysics (especially Aristotle and Neoplatonism). Classical kalām scholars — including Imām al-Māturīdī — engaged with falsafah to refute elements that contradicted revelation, while benefiting from logic and rational tools that did not violate the Sharīʿah.

Fiqh (فقه)
Islamic jurisprudence; the science of deriving practical legal rulings from the Qur'ān, Sunnah, consensus (ijmāʿ), and analogy (qiyās). The Māturīdī school historically accompanied the Ḥanafī madhhab.

ʿIlm al-Kalām (علم الكلام)
The science of Islamic theology — establishing belief through rational and scriptural proofs, defending the creed against deviant sects, and clarifying ambiguous matters. Imām al-Māturīdī is one of its greatest architects in Sunni Islam.

Iḥsān (الإحسان)
The highest dimension of religion, defined by the Prophet ﷺ: *"To worship Allāh as though you see Him, and if you do not see Him, know that He sees you."* Iḥsān is the spiritual excellence cultivated through taṣawwuf.

Ijtiḥād (اجتهاد)
The exertion of scholarly effort to derive rulings or theological conclusions when clear evidence is not explicit. It must be grounded in knowledge, methodology, and humility.

Īmān (الإيمان)
Faith. In the Māturīdī definition, īmān is *affirmation in the heart and confirmation by the tongue*, while actions perfect and complete faith but are not its essence. Īmān increases in certainty, not quantity.

Isnād (إسناد)
The chain of transmission for hadith and knowledge. Represents scholarly reliability and continuity. The Naqshbandī Golden Chain is a spiritual isnād.

Jahmiyyah (الجهمية)
A historical sect that denied many of Allāh's attributes and exaggerated divine transcendence to the point of negation. Mentioned in refutations by Sunni theologians including al-Māturīdī. (Included because it is referenced in the context of early kalām disputes.)

Kalām
See: ʿIlm al-Kalām.

Kasb (كسب)
The doctrine of "acquisition." In Māturīdī theology, humans possess real choice and are morally responsible for their deeds, while Allāh creates the act. Thus, humans *acquire* their actions, reconciling free will with qadar.

Madhhab (مذهب)
A school of law or methodology. In creed, the Sunni theological madhāhib are the Māturīdī and Ashʿarī schools. In fiqh, the four major Sunni madhāhib are Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī, and Ḥanbalī.

Māturīdī (الماتريدي)
Relating to the theological school founded by Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333 AH). The school emphasizes harmony between revelation and reason, affirms Allāh's attributes without anthropomorphism, upholds divine justice, and teaches that the intellect can know God's existence and some moral truths even before revelation.

Muʿtazilah (المعتزلة)
A rationalist sect that elevated reason over revelation in certain doctrinal matters, denied eternal divine attributes, and held controversial views on qadar and īmān. Opposed by both Ashʿarīs and Māturīdīs. (Included because they appear in the book.)

Naqshbandī (نقشبندي)
A major Sunni Sufi order tracing its spiritual chain to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (raḍiyAllāhu ʿanhu), emphasising silent dhikr, sobriety, discipline, and inward purification while living actively in society.

Nafs (نفس)
The lower self or ego, which must be purified through discipline, worship, and remembrance.

Nubuwwah (النبوة)
Prophethood — the institution by which Allāh sends messengers to guide humanity with revelation.

Qadar (القدر)
Divine decree — Allāh's eternal knowledge and will encompassing all events, while humans remain responsible for their choices.

Qiyās (قياس)
Analogical reasoning used by jurists to derive legal rulings when texts are not explicit.

Qur'ān
The final revelation from Allāh, sent to the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, preserved verbatim and serving as the supreme source of guidance in creed, law, and spirituality.

Rūḥ (روح)
The soul — created by Allāh, unseen, and the source of life for the body.

Sharīʿah (الشريعة)
The divine law governing outward actions and moral conduct, derived from revelation.

Sulūk (سلوك)
The spiritual path of inner refinement and journeying toward Allāh through disciplined practice.

Sunnah (السنة)
The teachings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, preserved in authentic reports and acting as a source of law and guidance.

Ṭarīqah (طريقة)
The spiritual path or Sufi order through which a seeker is trained in iḥsān under a qualified guide.

Tanzīh (تنزيه)
Declaring Allāh utterly free from resemblance to creation — a central principle in Māturīdī and Ashʿarī theology.

Ta'wīl (تأويل)
Interpretation of ambiguous scriptural texts in a manner that preserves transcendence and avoids anthropomorphism.

Tawḥīd (التوحيد)
The oneness and uniqueness of Allāh in His essence, attributes, and right to be worshipped.

Taṣawwuf (تصوف)
Islamic spirituality — purification of the heart, development of character, and attainment of iḥsān through dhikr, muraqabah, and discipline.

Takwīn (تكوين)
In Māturīdī theology, the eternal attribute of Allāh by which He brings creation into existence.

ʿUlamāʾ (علماء)
Scholars of the Islamic sciences who preserve, interpret, and transmit sacred knowledge.

Wahy (وحي)
Divine revelation sent to prophets.

Wilāyah (ولاية)
Sainthood — a rank granted by Allāh to His close friends (awliyā'), known by piety and nearness to Him.

Yaqīn (يقين)
Certainty — a state of unwavering conviction in faith.

Zuhd (زهد)

Detachment from worldly excess and over-attachment, while maintaining lawful engagement with life.

ENDNOTES

1. Qur'anic References

(All verses cited throughout the book)

- **Laysa kamithlihi shay'un** — "There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him." (Qur'an 42:11)
- **Qul huwa Allahu ahad** — "Say: He is Allah, the One." (Qur'an 112:1)
- **Allahu la ilaha illa huwa al-hayyu al-qayyum** — "Allah! There is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of all." (Qur'an 2:255)
- **Wahuwa bi kulli shay'in 'aleem** — "And He is, of all things, All-Knowing." (Qur'an 2:29)
- **Yaf'alu Allahu ma yashaa'** — "Allah does whatever He wills." (Qur'an 14:27)
- **Inna Allaha 'ala kulli shay'in qadeer** — "Indeed, Allah has power over all things." (Qur'an 2:20; 2:284; 3:29)
- **Innahu huwa as-samee'u al-baseer** — "Indeed, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing." (Qur'an 42:11)
- **Wa kallama Allahu Musa takleema** — "And Allah spoke directly to Moses." (Qur'an 4:164)
- **La tudrikuhu al-absar** — "Vision cannot grasp Him." (Qur'an 6:103)
- **Wa ma rabbuka bi dhallamin lil 'abeed** — "And your Lord is not ever unjust to the servants." (Qur'an 41:46)
- **Inna Allaha ya'muru bil 'adli wal ihsan** — "Indeed, Allah commands justice and excellence." (Qur'an 16:90)

- **Faman shaa'a fal yu'min waman shaa'a fal yakfur** — "Whoever wills, let him believe, and whoever wills, let him disbelieve." (Qur'an 18:29)
- **Wa hadaynahu an-najdayn** — "And We showed him the two ways (of right and wrong)." (Qur'an 90:10)
- **Inna kulla shay'in khalaqnahu bi qadar** — "Indeed, We have created everything according to a measure." (Qur'an 54:49)
- **Ma asaba min museebatin illa bi idhnillah** — "No calamity strikes except by Allah's permission." (Qur'an 57:22)
- **Afala ta'qiloon** — "Will you not use reason?" (Qur'an 2:44)
- **Inna fi dhalika la-ayatin li qawmin ya'qiloon** — "Indeed, in that are signs for a people who reason." (Qur'an 30:24)
- **Rusulan mubashshireena wa mundhireen** — "Messengers as bringers of glad tidings and warners." (Qur'an 4:165)
- **Man dhal-ladhi yuqridu Allaha qardan hasanan** — "Who is it that will lend Allah a goodly loan?" (Qur'an 2:245)
- **In tansuru Allaha yansurkum** — "If you help Allah, He will help you." (Qur'an 47:7)
- **Kullu man 'alayha faan, wa yabqa wajhu rabbika dhu al-jalali wal ikram** — "Everything on earth will perish, and only the Face of your Lord, full of Majesty and Honour, will remain." (Qur'an 55:26–27)

2. Classical Sources (Tafsir, Kalam, and Creed)

- Al-Maturidi, *Kitab al-Tawhid.*
- Al-Maturidi, *Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunnah.*

- Al-Nasafi, *al-'Aqidah al-Nasafiyyah.*
- Al-Taftazani, *Sharh al-'Aqa'id al-Nasafiyyah.*
- Al-Bazdawi, *Usul al-Din.*
- Al-Tahawi, *al-'Aqidah al-Tahawiyyah* (with classical commentaries).
- Al-Razi, *Tafsir al-Kabir* — relevant sections on divine attributes.
- Al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an.*
- Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim.*

3. Hadith and Early Spiritual References

- Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari.*
- Muslim, *Sahih Muslim.*
- Al-Qushayri, *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah.*
- Imam al-Harawi, *Manazil al-Sa'ireen.*
- Selected sayings from the Naqshbandi Golden Chain (authentic spiritual maxims transmitted through the Tariqah).

4. Historical and Heresiological Sources

- Abu al-Mu'in al-Nasafi, *Tabsirat al-Adillah.*
- 'Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq bayna al-Firaq* (on the Mu'tazilah, Jahmiyyah, etc.).

5. Modern Academic References (limited by choice)

- Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Maturidi and the Development of Sunni Theology.*
- Ramon Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World.*